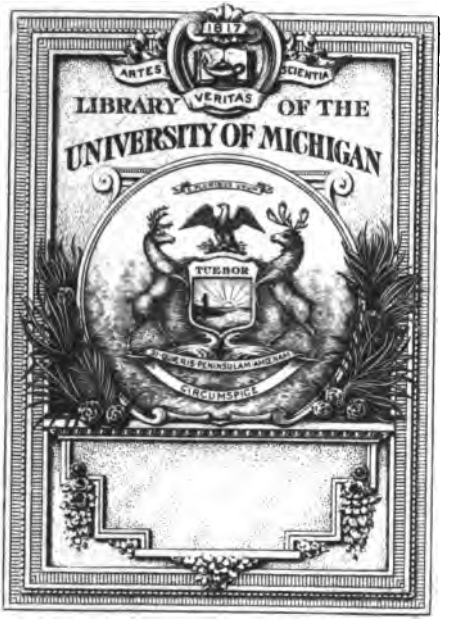

The Rise of a Soul

A STIMULUS TO PERSONAL PROGRESS and DEVELOPMENT

BY

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Sometimes the soul climbs slowly, and three score years and ten are spent upon the altar stairs. Sometimes the climb is swifter than the light, and steps which outrun the flight of angel wings, leave baby foot-prints on the altar stairs.

To the Memory of a Little Pilgrim

Whose flight was from the cradle to the glory, whose tiny grave is under Southern suns, and whose baby hands beckon us to the Summit, the book is dedicated.

How does the soul grow? Not all in a minute;
Now it may lose ground, and now it may win it;
Now it resolves, and again the will faileth;
Now it rejoiceth, and now it bewaileth;
Now its hopes fructify, then they are blighted;
Now it walks suddenly, now gropes benighted;
Fed by discouragements, taught by disaster;
So it goes forward, now slower, now faster;
Till, all the pain past, and failure made whole,
It is full-grown, and the Lord rules the soul."

SUSAN COOLIDGE.

FOREWORD

GOETHE calls life "the childhood of immortality," and David calls eternal life the immortality of youth.

The German singer does not contradict the Hebrew bard. Both poets are prophets of the soul's growth and development.

It is this thought, which Goethe and David have in common, and whose message is the true gospel of human greatness, that measures itself into the chapters which follow.

The writer's attempt is to tell the story of the rise of a soul in the four experiences of "Vision," "Shadows," "Ascent," and "Summit."

The first division is concerned with the prospect of the soul's possible greatness; the second with the things which obscure the prospect; the third with the steps and helps by which the upward climb is made; and the fourth with the goal and its abiding value.

The fundamental law throughout is, that soul-development is neither accidental nor mechanical, but organic and rational. The enabling force by which growth is achieved is divine energy imparted through Jesus Christ and his Spirit to

human life. The crowning fact is the soul "creating its own destiny of power."

The writer disclaims any intention of passing even indirectly on the merits of evolution as a theory of life. Granted a self-existent and all-sufficient God, and one may select his method of divine procedure without running disastrously into heresy.

It is nevertheless worth asking the question whether God's methods some thousands of years ago, differed greatly from his methods now; or whether God's methods in nature contradict his methods in grace.

When God grows a tree, he takes time. There is no arbitrary fiat speaking the tree, instanter and ex-nihilo, into the full perfection of stature and foliage; but long persistent growth, during which hindrances are overcome; helps from soil and sky, from sunshine and moisture are appropriated; conflicts with storm and drouth are waged and won; until at last and as a result of all, the sapling stands a giant oak in the forest close.

Has God a different method of growing a soul?

Probably not, and in the pages which follow, the attempt is to tell some part of the story of the soul's growth from that life which is "the childhood of immortality," to that more abundant life, which has "the immortality of youth."

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VISION

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ASCENT

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VISION

"Children of yesterday,
Heirs of to-morrow,
What are you weaving?
Labor and sorrow?
Look to your looms again,—
Faster and faster
Fly the great shuttles
Prepared by the Master.
Life's in the loom,
Room for it,—Room!"

MARY A. LATHBURY.

THE RISE OF A SOUL

I.

ONWARD AND UPWARD.

"Lift up my face and go,
Look out upon the light, and up and so,
Leaving Despair,
Push on to nobler things to do and dare,
For thy sweet sake,—and His
Whose glory is
Revealed to thee so soon,—and be
What your bright thought could wish for me,
A pure true life,
Brought nearer heaven and thee by each day's strife:
Love crystalised to deeds, remembrance purified,
By keeping close to Him, and close to thee, my Glorified."

GEORGE KLINGLE.

LIFE is a mountain climb with the sun's kiss and a clear sky at the summit. God wants man to be perfect. It need not take any one who thinks, very long to reach that conclusion. The goal of the divine purpose is not a discord but a harmony, not a defeat but a victory, not a blemish but perfection.

Man is very imperfect. It need not take any one who reflects very long to reach that conclusion. He falls short of the standard he sets for himself, and very far short of the standard set by his Maker. Human judgments are mingled with error, and human motives are mixed with prejudice. Conduct is faulty and character frail.

God wants man perfect, and man is very imperfect. Let those two facts stand side by side, confronted by a third. It is that man is not here by his own choice. He did not select his ancestors, cannot control his circumstances, but ancestors and circumstances largely determine him.

With such a premise it is hard to escape the conclusion that God is in some way responsible for man's failure to be all that God wants him to be. It seems scarcely fair to unload the entire burden of responsibility on the shoulders of poor old Adam, who has quite enough to do in bearing his own burden. To say that the condition is accidental dodges the issue. It must be part of the divine plan. If so, the greatest glory for a human life, at present, is the climb up out of the imperfect toward the perfect. God is working to produce character. Character is the outcome of struggle. There is a vast difference between a foundry and a forge. A foundry works with fluid and mould. Its product is brittle casting. A forge works with bar iron and furnace fire and anvil stroke. Its product is stiff steel.

God's smithy is not a foundry but a forge, and

> "Life is not as idle ore,
> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And batter'd with the shocks of doom,
> To shape and use." *

Just now a man's disgrace is not that he is imperfect, but that he is content to be; and his glory is not that he is perfect but that he wants to be and is struggling to be. Growth is the soul's grandeur. A gold dollar is a good dollar, but it can never be more than it is. It is a thing, and things do not grow. The soul may ever be becoming, rising into an ampler world, expanding into larger powers, commanding fuller sweeps, achieving diviner sympathies. Here is the meaning of all struggles and hardships. They are growing pains. The soul is bursting its bands and breaking its tethers.

Down at the bottom is man's "nothing perfect." Up at the summit is God's "all complete." The victory of life is the climb out of man's nothing perfect toward God's all complete. The steps by which the ascent is made are altar stairs. Every tug in the toilsome mount is an act of worship. The totality of struggle is the measure of life's greatness.

Sometimes the altar stairs are bathed in sunshine, and every footfall is a lyric note. Again

* Tennyson's *In Memoriam.*

they are mist-swathed and cloud-sheathed, sloping through sufferings up to God, and the measure is a dirge.

Whether the sky be clear or gray, and whether the walk be sight or faith, the resolute soul advances; treading now on bars of sunshine and anon stepping through deep draping shadows, but ever pressing a way that is onward and upward.

II

A MAN'S CHANCE

"Take heart, the Master builds again;
A charmed life old goodness hath;
The tares may perish, but the grain
Is not for death.
God works in all things; all obey
His first propulsion from the night;
Wake thou and watch! the world is gray
With morning light!"

JOHN G. WHITTIER.

THE Creator's purpose is the creature's chance. There was a vocal hour in the stretches of silence, when the Maker said to man, "Have dominion."*

Whether God spoke in prose or poetry is not important. The chief thing to notice is the fact that Deity was opening to human life the way to the throne.

That pristine command of sovereign grace to sinless man, antedating the fall, is the record of a man's chance away back in the dawn of the world's first morning.

* Gen. 1:28.

The chance was sublime. It was God-given. It is permission, entreaty and command together. Omnipotence opens the door of opportunity and omniscience points out the path to glory.

The man is fresh from the hand of God. The breath of divinity is on his face. He is but little lower than the angels. At his feet is the virgin world, its harmony broken as yet by no discord, its beauty spoiled by no blemish. It is peopled with creatures to serve and stocked with the limitless resources of divine provision. It is as good a world as God could make, and the man as kingly a man as divinity could fashion.

God spake a great word into the man's soul,— "Have dominion." He tells him to take the throne and be the monarch of the world. That was the first man's sublime, inspiring chance.

The pity is he lost it. The sceptre slipped from his hand and his dominion passed. He fell from his throne because he lost dominion over himself. He could not rule his own spirit. Instead of the monarch of the world he became the victim of silly fears and superstitions and a vagabond upon the earth.

Such is the first chapter in the study of the subject. A present-day man may say "If I could have the first man's chance, I'd do better. Let God give me an Adamic opportunity, let me stand that close to the Creator and look out upon a world as beautiful and untarnished and listen

to a message as inspiring and commanding, and I would make my chance. I would establish my throne and retain my kingdom. If God had given to me the first man's chance, this old world would be a very different world to-day." Fortunately, the first chapter in the record of a man's chance is not the last nor the only chapter.

God gives every man a chance. No matter how weak or unworthy the man may be in himself, the power which presides over the destiny of the race gives him a chance. God is not partial. He does not select a small coterie from the great crowd as the objects of his special favour and say to the rest of mankind, "Go to the waste heap." Neither does he start the soul so handicapped by birth and circumstance as to make it impossible to rise. Omnipotence holds open the door of opportunity for all, and the chance given is ever a great and inspiring one. It is God's way of still saying to man, "Have dominion. Be a king. Assert yourself at the top of creation." One may be hampered, but God makes it possible for him to achieve the best character and the noblest experience. He may not give him the chance of money or fame. The best chance is not necessarily struck in the register of coin. The highest success in life is not kept in pantry or wardrobe.

The royal chance is the opportunity to live a true life. Life is more than meat and body than raiment. If one blesses the world by making it

better, if he lives an honourable life, dies a peaceful death and leaves behind a blessed memory, he has fought his battles to some purpose, whether or not there be coin in his purse and renown to his name.

God opens the treasury vaults of all the good when he says, "Ask and ye shall receive." But for a chance to be worth much, one must be convinced of its reality. He must know it is there. The plows scraped the surface of Middle Tennessee soil for a century, and the farmers' songs were all of "hard times." Deeper down in the phosphate beds there was something better than a gold mine, but the farmers did not know their chance, and "hard times" held sway. One day a man saw the chance, showed it to his fellows, and "prosperity" became the favourite air.

The soul's chance is not a fiction. As long as God says, "Have dominion," there is hope. "Despair" is a word to strike out of the dictionary of life. The future is before us, the world is around us, God is above us. There is a chance. Let a man dare to believe it and the battle is half won. It may be only a fighting chance, but so long as God is well disposed, there is no room for despair.

A man may lose his chance. The mere fact that he has it will not save it. He must make it. Men make opportunities far oftener than opportunities men. The trouble is not that we have

lacked a chance but having possessed it, it has been despised.

Some men lose their chance through sheer stupidity. They are too dull to see it when it comes. They say, "It is a poor, starving world. All is common-place. Every day is a humdrum day and every hour uneventful. All the great opportunities are behind. It is useless to struggle or stay awake."

One day a Nuremburg glass-cutter let some aquafortis fall on his spectacles. He noticed that the glass was softened and corroded where the acid fell. That was his chance. A stupid man would have said "My spectacles are ruined." This man drew some figures on a piece of glass, covered them with varnish, applied the acid and cut away the glass from around the figures. Then, removing the varnish, the figures appeared upon a dark ground, and etching upon glass was added to the ornamental arts. The men who have saved their chance have had sense enough to see it when it came.

Some fail by despising the days of preparation. One must himself be ready for his opportunity when it comes. Most of us think after the crisis is over. The king thinks before the crisis comes. One must take advantage of his advantages. He may lose his chance a decade before it arrives. God has a splendid opportunity down in the calendar of every life. To meet it one must be something himself.

To despise the days of preparation, to surrender to vice, to rot down manhood with dissipation, is to defeat the good will of God. When opportunity comes, instead of a man, there is a midget. He may whine out, "I have lost my chance." Yes, he lost it twenty years before it came.

Procrastination also defeats opportunity. The door swings open and shut. A man must enter while it is open. He must strike the iron while it is hot. The chance cannot be recalled when it has passed. New ones come, but the old ones, gone by, are gone forever.

Chances are lost through selfishness and the preference of personal ease to future success. Indolence never gives birth to opportunity. A man must toil toward success. All the great statesmen, orators, scholars, soldiers, scientists, journalists, have been indefatigable workers. One may point to some commanding figure in church or state and say, "I wish I had that man's chance." He may if he is willing to do that man's work.

Men have lost their chance through dishonour and dishonesty. There are some who might have stood royal among their fellows, but for the fact that they were scoundrels. In the stress of the crisis they betrayed their cause and their friends. That is one thing the world will not permanently abide. Honour alone lasts. Time has sharp and curious eyes. It pries into all secrets. Honour

alone will stand the scrutiny of the centuries. The man who sells out has lost his chance.

Many fail through despising trifles. A great chance usually does not come in with blare of trumpets. It announces its presence by a trifle. "The kingdom cometh not with observation."

Many are after something imposing. They worship that which bulks. But the world has ever turned on pivot points, and the man of destiny has been careful of trifles. The greatest fortunes have often been built on an insignificancy. The invention of the paragon frame for umbrellas made Samuel Fox a millionaire. Siemens, the man who invented the method of converting iron into steel, amassed by that alone, a fortune of twenty-five million dollars. One vote it is said, in the last analysis, and that the vote of a man who was brought from the corn field to the polls by one who paid him fifty cents for his day's work and gave him his boots to wear and his horse to ride, decided the succession of events which secured the admission of the State of Texas into the Union.

Trifles are momentous. They are the door of limitless opportunity, creaking on its hinges. He who would capture the chance must keep his eyes open, his hands active and his heart pure.

What are all these mistakes by which a man loses his chance but different forms of the one great mistake by which the first man lost his chance? They are but different forms of the

loss of dominion over self. One must control himself. He must rule well the kingdom within before he can hope to subdue the world without.

What is a man's chance to-day? Can it be said not to exist? The man of the modern world has a chance the angels may well envy. The sky is not starless. To be a human being is to be clothed with divine possibilities. It is to stand within reach of the cross, within reach of a lost world, within reach of God's heaven. That chance is sublime.

There is such a thing as the helplessness of the Almighty. A man may make a machine that can do what its maker cannot. So God's creature may reach a realm which God himself cannot occupy.

God's helplessness creates man's chance. He can do some things which God cannot, and God is calling upon him to share in the redemption of the world. It is his chance to join forces with God and build here on the ruins of that pristine paradise a better, diviner world than ever lay at Adam's feet.

A man's chance to-day is bigger and better than ever before. He may pine for paradise and sigh to stand back in the dawn of the world's first morning, with the unspoiled earth outspread around him, and hear God say "Have dominion." Far better is it to stand in the midst of the modern world, with its rich, resourceful life throbbing

in the manifold activities of the masterful present, and hear God's command to take the throne.

This is a better world than Adam's. A man has a better chance. The Garden of Eden was limited. All that one could do was to vegetate. Man has vastly more power now, more knowledge, more opportunity. The forces of the world are under his fingers. He has chained the lightning, bridled the wind, and made the clouds his wings. The world is roomier. Why should a sensible man want to go back to the Garden of Eden? A sinner saved by grace and lifted into the glory of fellowship with Christ is higher up toward God than Adam's "a little lower than the angels."

God stands a man in the midst of this modern world, amid all its inventions and discoveries, and says, "Have dominion." He stands him in the libraries of the world and says, "Have dominion." He stands him in the council chambers of the nations and in the parliament of the universe, and says, "Have dominion." In the "centre of immensities, in the conflux of eternities," Jehovah stands the modern man and bids him govern all.

This is his chance. It is divine. It is enough to thrill a stone with life and transfuse a clod with passion for immortality.

III

THE THREE GREAT VERBS OF LIFE

"Pigmies are pigmies still; though perched on Alps,
And pyramids are pyramids in vales,
Each man makes his own stature, builds himself;
Virtue alone outbuilds the pyramids;
Her monuments shall last, when Egypt's fall—
'Tis moral grandeur makes the mighty man."

YOUNG.

THERE are three sovereign life-verbs, whose conjugation in all the voices and moods and tenses of being, exploits existence; and whose relative position to each other in the individual career, defines rank and determines destiny.

The first of the trinity is the verb "to have." Its realm is the kingdom of property, and its throne-thought is wealth.

God recognises the important place which the verb to have occupies in solving the problem of life. Perhaps nine-tenths of all the motives by which he incites to the duties and graces of the Christian life may be uttered in terms of the verb to have. He says, "You shall have." He promises to give pardon, peace, life, joy, happiness,

success. All of this is so much spiritual coin, with which the Maker would lure the creature on to the best.

If God appeals to the instinct for gain, to acquire cannot be wholly wrong.

The desire to have is inborn. Man is a constitutional seeker. His extremities are armed with hands which grasp and hold. He who deliberately prefers penury to opulence is a freak. The deliberate election of want over plenty is insanity.

Property means ability. Wealth is power. It brings things to pass. It is the god who answers many an earnest prayer. There is no virtue in poverty as such, nor any crime in wealth.

It is not strange, therefore, that people should be estimated by what they have. A man of wealth is a man of importance. Strip him of his wealth and he may lose his importance. Property is a lofty and commanding influence in the councils of human life.

Is money an infallible standard of greatness? Is the plutocrat the king of men? Before giving an answer it will be well to bear in mind some things on the other side.

Money may degenerate into a curse. It may become a tyrannical master instead of a servant. Instead of owning your wealth it may own you. When once the love of gain has gotten the complete mastery of a human life, it turns loose a brood of demon-passions,—avarice, greed, covet-

ousness, lust,—which feed like vultures on the nobler self.

The miser is the apostacy of wealth. He is in abject servitude to a mere thing. He lives in the ante-room of hell. His countenance is the expression of a lost soul. His eyes are flames of unrest flaring in sockets of greed. His heart is a fagot in the furnace fires of torment.

There must be something greater for a human life than to be able to conjugate the verb to have. Man fails to reach his serene grandeur in wealth. What a fall to dwindle down into nothing but an attachment to a bank account; or a figure-head with which to mark a transition in the title to real estate. Estimated by the verb to have the apostles were insignificant. Judged by their wealth, genius and learning must take a lowly place, and Jesus of Nazareth rank below mediocrity.

There is something beyond the verb to have. There is the verb "to do." Its realm is not the kingdom of property but the kingdom of service, and its throne-thought is not wealth but strength.

God also recognises the high place which the verb to do has in solving the problem of life. Perhaps nine-tenths of all that he demands may be uttered in terms of the verb to do. He calls for service. We have a way of estimating people by their views. A man of certain views is a very good man, while one of opposite views is a

very bad man. A man of our views is a prophet, and a man who opposes our views is a heretic. Christ did not say "by their views ye shall know them," but "by their fruits ye shall know them." The divine emphasis is on deeds rather than creeds, and the ideal life is that which goes about doing good.

What the world needs is service. Its hurts are not healed by theories. To hold a mass-meeting, have a discussion, adopt resolutions, and appoint committees which never meet is merely to open a harmless vent for the people's indignation against public wrong. Passionate tirades, windy publications, eternal talk are not the medicine for social and commercial infirmities. Something needs to be done.

The mission of strength is service. It cannot be hoarded. If it is not used it will cease. Exercise is the law of vitality, and service the source as well as the expression of strength.

The high place occupied by the verb to do is seen also in the character of the heavenly reward. There the great question will not be: "What have you," but "what have you done?" The life which takes its place on God's right hand must merit, "Well done." Christ's comrades in glory will be those who have done something. Life is not the spectacular display of one's things in a show window, with a spieler on the sidewalk to cry out their virtues. Life is going about doing good. At last it will be discovered that

many, who had very little, rank higher because they did good as they had opportunity.

Is the verb to do as high as the soul can go in the climb to greatness? Before one can do, there must be the power or the ability to do. The locomotive must have power in the boilers if it is to pull out of the trainshed. The trolley car stands helpless on the track until it draws on the dynamo at the power house. There is something beyond the ceaseless dinning of the verb to do. It is reached in the last of the trinity of life-words.

The greatest of the three great verbs of life is not the verb "to have," nor the verb "to do," but the verb "to be." Its realm is not the kingdom of property, nor of service, but of character. Its throne-thought is not wealth nor strength, but conviction.

Here God lays the stress. Earth may ask "What have you?" Heaven may ask "What did you?" But the God of all the ages asks: "What are you?"

The highest command is not "Take heed unto thy wealth," nor "Take heed unto thy service," but "Take heed unto thyself." * The first kingdom to be sought is God's, and that kingdom is within. It is not meat and drink but character.

What one is dominates what he has and determines what he does.

Convictions control property. Its use or abuse,

* 1 Tim. 4: 16.

in the last analysis, is the expression of what one is. The only thing that can save riches from becoming a disaster is character. The more one has the more he needs to be.

Convictions are likewise the motive power of service. One's deeds are the expression of his faith. In the domain of service one will not fall below himself, nor can he rise above himself.

In the world to come the crisis will speak at the mark of character. As life enters the highest realm it leaves things behind. All of service it can take, is the story of it. Self abides, and the totality of what a man is survives and stands forth in the absolute and exact measurements of the verb to be.

"I myself am heaven and hell."

Therefore, the main business of life must be the making of a man, the building of a character.

The soul's supremest glory is its ability to conjugate in all worlds, and in all the voices and moods and tenses of existence the sovereign greatness of the verb to be.

To become is to be great; and to be great is to achieve the evolution of self-dignity, the development of soul-power, the culture and growth of mental and moral being, and the imperative insistence of life for more room.

The mission of the World's Redeemer is to enable the soul to achieve the infinite possibilities of the verb to be.

He does not always say "You shall have." He

may keep the soul poor in things and decree that, for the present, the discipline of hardship and privation is best. He does not always say, "You shall do." There are saintly lives shut in rooms of invalidism, or fastened down to chairs of inaction and infirmity; to whom God gives the sacrament of pain, and in whom he is seeking the grace of patience.

But every soul, whether it have little or much, whether its residence be in the solitary room or in the hurrying crowd, has permission to mount the throne of conviction and reign as monarch in the kingdom of character.

The Maker sees not only what we are but what we may be. The vision of grace is unto the top of the altar stairs, and the effort of grace is to make its vision a reality.

The struggle to be is the soul's master effort. For sake of that one does well to count every sacrifice a boon, welcome every hardship a blessing, and hail every cross a ladder on which to climb to greatness. If God calls, the way is open to become. The heir of the future must charge his soul with the goal of its highest victory and set his immortal spirit upon the quest of its supremest glory.

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll,
Leave thy low-vaulted past;
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,

Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast;
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine out-grown shell by life's unresting sea."*

* Oliver W. Holmes.

IV.

THE ALTAR STAIRS

"The world's great altar stairs
That slope through darkness up to God."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

LONG ago a holy man, climbing life's altar stairs, shouted a great word of encouragement to his brothers struggling below him. "The God of all grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory * * * make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." *

He seemed to say, "There is a kingdom of glory at the summit but you must climb to reach it. In climbing there are at least three landings you must make. You must be stablished, strengthened, settled."

These are the altar stair landings; and they mean that in the struggle out of the imperfect toward the perfect, there is something to believe, something to do, something to possess. Then comes the kingdom of glory.

There is something to believe. Man is to be established. He is established when he believes.

* 1 Pet. 5: 10.

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." *

He is established when his beliefs cease to be opinions and become convictions, and when these convictions command him.

Faith is the first step in the climb out of human littleness. It is a step more difficult to achieve now than formerly. The old faiths have been assailed; the new faiths have not been vindicated. What shall one believe? He must forge his creed for himself. He must achieve the altar-stair of faith rather than be lifted to it. If he does this in a manly way, he will need more than a medieval crutch for support. He must have the moral fibre and mental muscle which make a spiritual athlete. Satan is still in the world, but he has changed his appearance. Instead of horns, he has a shining bald pate; instead of hoofs, he wears patent leathers; instead of breathing out fire and brimstone he smokes good Havanas; and instead of going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, he goes about with an encyclopedic expression of countenance and an agnostical sigh, trying to destroy faith in God.

It has come to that pass where doubt is regarded as an evidence of intellectual culture, and faith as a mark of mental decrepitude.

Kate Douglas Wiggin in "Penelope's Progress" charmingly depicts a Scotch maid whose entire repertory of conversation was exhausted in

* Jas. 1:8.

a single phrase with which she invariably replied to all questions. The only answer she deigned to give was "I could na' say." "Jean, is your mistress in?" "I could na' say." "Jean who lives next door?" "I could na' say." Jean is it raining?" Turning upon you her blue Scotch non-committal eyes, she would respond as was her custom "I could na' say."

There is a notion prevalent that this is about as far as man can go in the climb toward God. Is the Bible inspired? Lazy doubt, at the foot of the altar stairs answers "I could not say; I do not know." Is Jesus Christ divine? Is the soul immortal? Again modern unbelief idly rolls its lustreless orbs, and answers as is its custom, "I do not know." That sort of doubt never makes the first landing in the climb toward greatness.

Doubt in itself is never mounting up to light, but ever plunging down deeper into darkness and despair. The man who thinks more of his doubts than he does of his faiths, who cultivates his doubts and neglects his faiths, and who imagines that what he has been taught to believe is for that reason to be called in question, will soon find himself adrift on a shoreless sea, driving to the utter wreck of all religious hope and to the utter loss of all religious experience.

The failure to achieve the landing of faith is the explanation of the easy victory which innumerable silly 'isms win in the competition of creeds for converts. Anything that is persist-

ently preached gets a following. Christian Science and its kindred delusions have gained a somewhat numerous clientage, despite the patent folly of their dogmas.

How do sensible people reach the point where they give a sincere and devout subscription to vagaries at once absurd and dangerous? The only explanation is, they have never been indoctrinated in the fundamental truths of religious life. They are soul-hungry and are mistaking husks for kernels. They have never been established. Physical and mental culture are essential to success in life, and the parent who denies his child either of these has shirked parental responsibility. More important, however is spiritual culture, and yet there is an impression that the child's soul must be allowed to vegetate, if it is to attain symmetric growth. As well try to keep a garden clean of weeds by neglect.

The life that grows must be established. It must have beneath its feet not mud but rock; and for its residence not swamps but tableland.

The second landing is strength.

In climbing the altar stairs there is something to do. The thought behind strength is service.

One has not completed the ascent to God when he has achieved a comfortable and orthodox creed. That is something to be sure. We are sometimes disposed to think it is all. In comparison with the ultimate summit peak, it is only a foot-hill. Deeds are higher than creeds.

Creeds are in order to deeds. Faith is not valuable for spectacular purposes. It secures value in proportion as it arrives at service. Behind the noblest service the world has known has been the staunchest faith.

If faith is to keep the place to which it has climbed, it must go further. It must make the altar stair of service. The heroic chapters in human history tell how man has climbed from faith to strength on the stairway of service.

For a century Holland, the then smallest of the nations, struggled against Spain, the then mightiest. The conflict was as desperate as it was long. But the Dutch were sustained by a mighty faith, and at last won their independence. Who that cares for courage and honours heroism but thrills at the story of the memorable siege of Leyden? The inhabitants had been reduced to such desperate straits that the only food left consisted of dogs and cats. Their enemies, in great derision, called them "dog and cat eaters." Hear their dauntless reply. "As long as you shall hear the bark of a dog or the mew of a cat, know that the city holds. When these are gone, we will devour our left arms retaining our right to defend our homes and our freedom. When all else has failed we will with our own hands set fire to the city, and perish men, women, and children together, rather than see our families destroyed and our religion desecrated by the foreign tyrant."

No wonder the Dutch gained their independence. Their faith in God was more than a dogma, it was the passion of their life.

The trouble with many of the creeds of Christendom is that they never take the field. They are permanent residents of the theological mummy crypt.

If they are militant at all, they attach themselves to the ambulance corps, or to the commissary department, and fail to reach the firing line.

The faith which is to lift the world must arrive at service. It must do something. Man is saved to serve.

This second landing on the altar stairs must be climbed on the knees. Here weakness is strength. There must be sacrifice and self-abnegation, humility and self crucifixion.

"And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to His feet."*

In the Cathedral of Cologne there is a rude oak image, representing a giant with a child on his shoulder. It is called "Offero in search of a master." This is the legend of the image.

* Robert Browning.

Offero determined to serve none but the mightiest. After diligent search he attached himself to one whom he believed to be the greatest of monarchs. All went well until one day when Satan's name was mentioned, the king turned pale and trembled. Offero asked the cause of the king's fear, and was told; "It is the Prince of darkness, for he is mightier than the king."

That very day Offero went in search of Satan, and soon finding him enlisted in his service. All went well, until a certain day when as they approached a cross on the highway Satan fell back trembling. When Offero asked the cause of Satan's fear, he was told: "It is the Christ, who rules in heaven, for he is mightiest of all."

Then Offero went seeking for Christ. A barefooted friar told him that if he would do good as he had opportunity, Christ would reveal himself. The giant built a hut by the riverside and devoted his life to good deeds. One dark night he heard a child calling, "Offero, come and carry me over." Lifting the child to his shoulder, he entered the ford. The winds blew fiercely, the burden on his shoulder grew heavier and seemed to crush him, the flood rose to his lips and he was near drowning. In the midst of the stream a supernatural strength seemed to be given him, and when he touched the farther bank, the Christ met him and said: "Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of these least, thou hast done it unto me."

The giant had climbed toward God on the altar stair of service.

There is another landing still higher. A man is to be "settled." The thought behind this is the life of unbroken calm and quiet, contented peace. There is something to claim, something to possess. It is the divine bequest of peace.

Reaching the last landing means getting above the storm line, above the frets and worries and distractions of the lower levels, into the great and sovereign composure of conscious and uninterrupted communion with God.

"The Lord give thee peace." This is the voice which greets the climber at the third landing of the altar stairs. Peace is what the soul asks for at the foot of the stairs but it must be achieved before it can be possessed. One must scale the heights of faith and cross the fields of service, before he can dwell on the plains of peace.

This country is not a mirage, but its stretches lie high and close to God.

It is said that in the fiercest cyclone that sweeps the plain, there is one spot of perfect calm where a baby may lie unharmed. It is at the storm's centre. Whether that be true or not it is true that in this storm-swept tempest-driven world of ours there is one place of high and holy calm, of triumphant and imperturbable quiet, where the frailest life may dwell in perfect peace. It is at God's feet.

There is something to believe, something to do,

something to possess. Down at the foot of the stairs are we, and up at the top of the stairs the sweetest angel-voices gather to sing the call songs to the glory-land. We want the angels to come down to us, but God wants us to mount up to the angels.

"Angels of growth!
Did ye descend, what were ye more than I?
Wait there—wait and invite me while I climb;
For, see, I come! but slow, but slow!
Yet even as your chime,
Soft and sublime,
Lifts at my feet, they move, they go,
Up the great stair of time." *

Better than the angel-singers, the great Father is there at the top of the stairs stretching down a helping hand to those who are struggling up.

As the soul listens, it hears the Father say, "Believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The soul answers "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief;" and lo the first landing in the life-climb is made. Again the soul hears the great Father say: "Do with thy might whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." The soul answers "Lord I am weak, out of my weakness ordain strength;" and the landing of service is achieved.

A third time God speaks: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I

* David A. Wasson.

will give you rest. The soul answers: "Lord I am weary with the long journey and worn with the struggle. Tired and fainting I come, having heard the sweet angelus call of the Gospel, and I claim thy blessed bequest." The soul has reached the plains of peace, and from the plains of peace, one can look over into the kingdom of glory.

V

THE GREATNESS MEN TO-DAY ADORE

"'Write me as one that loves his fellowmen.'"
The angel wrote and vanished. The next night
He came again with a great wakening light,
And showed their names whom love of God had blessed.
And, lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest."

LEIGH HUNT.

THERE was a day when men thought brawn was divinity. God was a muscular giant. Hercules was worshipped. "Might makes right" was the supreme international law. Power was regarded as a virtue. It was the age of the divine right of strenuosity.

Undoubtedly there was a great truth at the centre of the world's worship of brawn. There is no virtue in weakness and no glory in suicide. Might is greatness, but it is not summit greatness.

Then, in the evolution of humanity there came a day when man thought brain was divinity. God became an intellectual giant. The world deified its poets and philosophers. The arts flourished. It was the age of the divine right of

culture. Undoubtedly there was a great truth at the centre of the world's worship of brain. There is no virtue in stupidity, and no glory in ignorance. Knowledge is power and thought is greatness, but it is not summit greatness.

Then, in the further evolution of humanity, Jesus of Nazareth appeared. He called himself "the Son of Man," and said: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." *

From that day men have thought that service is divinity. God is the man of Galilee. The world has recognised the divinity of the ministering Christ. Power and culture reach their real glory only as they stoop to serve. The age of the divine right of unselfish devotion to the good of others is upon us; and the law for nations and individuals is the golden rule.

The supreme fact about Christ, which stands high and clear above all else is that he lived for others. He was not a monarch but a minister, not a king but a servant.

When he taught, he "spake as never man spake." He did not focus attention upon himself. As one reads the sermon on the mount or the Passover discourse he is thinking not so much about the speaker as his message. The greatness of Christ's miracles was not the display of supernatural power but the graciousness of deeds of mercy done to relieve the distressed and suf-

* Matt. 20: 28.

fering. When Christ drove the devils out of Legion and changed the man's residence from a graveyard to the living abodes of his fellow men, he was not thinking of himself. When he comforted the woman that was a sinner, when he touched the leper, when he stopped the crowd to bless a timid woman whose trembling hand had touched the hem of his robe, Jesus was not trying to glorify himself. When he girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples' feet he was but giving expression to the most conspicuous trait of his character. He was taking a servant's place.

It is impossible to follow him for a single day or to live with him a single hour without being impressed with this fact. Even his vicarious sufferings do not attract attention so much to themselves as to the fact that they were endured for others. In the central glory of his passion, as he hung on the cross, the face of the penitent thief appears and the voice of the dying Christ breaks the silence with blessing for another. Is it irreverent to regard this incident of the penitent thief on the cross as an artistic effect, by which the serving Christ in the supreme moment of his crucifixion diverts the gaze of men and angels, focused on that central cross, from his own sufferings, to the object for which all was endured?

The greatness of Jesus was the greatness of a servant. He was this, not because it chanced to be his lot. It was his by deliberate selection. It

was not accidental but intentional. It was not forced but sought. It was Christ's eternal choice of a life-vocation. He was a self-elected sufferer for other sufferers' sakes.

He could have escaped service had he cared. Nothing is plainer than the fact that Jesus could have commanded a life of ease. He could have brought the world to his feet and founded an earthly dynasty, had he cared to do so. The very angels seemed to vie with each other in the effort to serve him. Whenever the veil of the invisible world was lifted for a moment, celestial beings appeared swift and ambitious to minister to Christ. It was not hard fate which made him a servant. He deliberately preferred it. It was the ambition of his life. The thing which attracted him to earth was the chance to serve.

The cross was not a dilemma but a goal. The agony in Gethsemane was no timid and cowardly shrinking from the cross which he had sought with all the passion of his life; but the fear lest through extreme physical weakness Satan might at last cheat him of the supreme glory of that transcendent hour of unselfish service and suffering for others.

Perhaps we have not listened aright to that most tragic cry of the deserted Christ on Calvary —"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," unless we discern in its muffled melancholy measure, at least one joyous, exultant note of victory.

The world was counting the day of coronation the greatest; but Christ has shown that the day of crucifixion is greater. The cross is higher than the crown.

This is the explanation of the world's worship of Christ. It may not always measure up to it or even strive after it, but since the Nazarene appeared, the world's picture of divinity is not a king crowned in sceptred state, but a servant sharing the sorrows and lifting heavy burdens from the tired shoulders of his fellows. Had Christ won his way to greatness by any other path than the altar stairs of service, his glory would have passed.

Had he been merely a great miracle worker the world would have wondered at him. Had he been merely a great teacher the world would have admired him. But because he became a minister and took the place of a servant, the world worships him.

Christ came not to be a monarch but a minister, but because he was a minister he became mightier than a monarch. He came not to be a king but a servant, and because he was a servant he has more than kingly power. He came not to be an autocrat but a slave, and because he made himself of no reputation, he is adored as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the greatness men to-day adore. It is the greatness which heaven has always adored. It is the greatness which having won its way to

the throne in this world, will find crowns and thrones awaiting it in all worlds.

What does it involve?

There is demanded something more than service for the sake of those beloved. That may be but the gratification of a natural instinct.

On a bleak day in February, 1901, a man at New Durham, N. J., sprang upon the railroad track before a passenger train running at full speed to rescue a child playing in that place of deadly peril. The boy was saved, the man was ground to death beneath the wheels. His deed was heroic but natural, for the lad was his own child. In one of the Eastern hospitals a man submitted to the removal of twenty square inches of cuticle from his living body that it might be grafted upon a woman whose body had been horribly burned and mutilated in a fire. His sacrifice was admirable but the woman for whom it was made was his wife to whom at the marriage altar he had plighted the troth which never knows doubt nor change.

The service which achieves real greatness is serving for the love of serving. It is the deliberate, persistent, and exultant preference of the life-rôle of servant over that of served. It is the choice of altar-stairs over throne-seats. It is esteeming the towel and basin of the ministering Christ above the girdle of royalty and the pomp and adulation of sceptre and crown.

After all is said that can be said for ease and

wealth, for genius and culture, for rank and place, the world reserves its profoundest respect and sincerest homage for the greatness which climbs on the altar-stairs of the dead self to higher things, and which finds its supreme joy and glory in sincere, unpretentious, unselfish devotion to the good of others.

In the first Presbyterian church of Nashville, Tenn., there is a saintly and devoted woman affectionately known to high and low, to rich and poor as "Miss Martha." She belongs to that class without which any church or community is poor, and who find their greatest joy in deeds of love and mercy to others. In the city was a woman who had known better days, but through the profligacy of a dissipated and improvident husband, she was forced to support herself and her three little children by sewing. She toiled early and late but the income was small. In the close air of the room where she worked, and under the strain of late hours the woman's health gave way. There came a day when she could no longer go to work. The doctor pronounced her case consumption. Soon want knocked at the door; but fast upon the spectre of want came an angel in the guise of Miss Martha. The woman and her children were removed to the northern part of the city where the air was more bracing. The services of a trained nurse were secured. The children were cared for. Better than all else Miss Martha brightened the room

with her presence. With cheering words and kindly ministrations of love she comforted the wan mother who tried to hope that with the coming of the spring, the dreadful cough might yield and health return. But that terrible disease which marches with steady and unfaltering steps refused to mend, and after eight months of lingering illness the poor woman passed away.

Her minister was with her a half hour before she died. The death damp was already on her brow and she knew that the end was near. He repeated the twenty-third Psalm, and in a short prayer asked that the crossing might be easy and triumphant. Then the sick woman called her aged mother to the bedside and bade her good bye. In the room was her uncle, an old Confederate soldier whose eyes had been shot out in battle. The blind man was led to the bedside, and she asked him to meet her in heaven. Then turning to the minister she said "I know I am dying, and I do not mind it for myself; but how can I leave my children motherless? I believe God can make me well, even now, and if he will, —I'll promise him—if God will make me well, I'll promise him to be as good—as—I'll promise him to be as good as Miss Martha!"

She who had shown forth the greatness of unselfish service for the good of others, had become to the woman's soul the clearest revelation of goodness. From the radiant presence of the ministering servant it was an easy passage for

the dying mother through the shadow into the more radiant presence of the ministering Saviour.

" These are the heroes men to-day adore,
These are the valiant ones above all story;
This is the pathway to the modern glory,
Which down the years with added power shall pour." *

* James H. West.

VI

A MAN'S GROWTH TOWARD GOD

"Heaven is not reached at a single bound;
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."

JOSEPH H. MANSFIELD.

THE vision of the soul's possibilities may become more luminous and vivid if seen through the medium of some life that has realised the vision. Such a medium is afforded in the career of Simon Peter. Perhaps more conspicuously than any other apostle, he illustrates the possibilities of the growth of a human life into the likeness of God.

There are two portraits of Peter, one taken at the threshold of his apostolic career and the other near its termination, which disclose the fact of the soul's development; and which, placed side by side reveal the higher possibilities for any human life.

The first portrait is given when Jesus said "Thou art Simon Son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas which is by interpretation, a

stone." * It is as though Christ had said: "Thou art a provincial peasant; thou shalt become a world-famed age-making-apostle."

In this first portrait Peter is a Galilean fisherman. He has not looked beyond the rim of hills which serrate his sky-line, nor thought beyond the boats and nets which make his daily toil. He is rash, energetic, impetuous, capable; but he is entirely provincial.

The man of Galilee passes by the peasant's fishing smack and says "Simon, thou shalt be." From that hour the man's soul thrusts out into a larger world.

The second portrait is given when Peter himself says; "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." † It is as though he had said: "Once I thought this world of sight and time all; now it is but a shadow, for I see the invisible and apprehend the eternal."

In the second portrait Simon Peter is apostle and prophet. He has broken through the hills into a horizon that is limitless. He is thinking thoughts, the ebb and flow of whose tide lap the beach of the infinite. He has grown to be an old man. He has endured much. He has lived. He has stamped his personality on the world in such a way it can never forget him, and has helped to found here, in changing time, a kingdom that will endure forever. His sunset hour

* Jno. 1:42. † 2 Peter 3:13.

draws on apace. His work is almost done, and yet he seems never to have had more to live for. He is not ninety years old but ninety years young. The day is at the morn for this veteran of a century, and in the ecstacy of unspent strength and undiminished enthusiasm, he exclaims: "I see new heavens and a new earth."

During the years lying between these two portraits a wonderful change has taken place in Simon Peter. He has fought many battles. He has conquered self. He has fought and fallen and risen to fight on. All the while, through tempest and calm, through suffering and trial and conflict, he has been clambering up the heights by which a human soul rises to God. At last he finds himself with the ample world at his feet, in sight of the unseen.

It is worth crossing a continent to get the view from the summit of Pike's Peak. One may get swiftly to the top by the cog-wheel railway, he may take a day of it on the back of the poky burro, or he may plod the steep and slowly winding footpath, until he has put fourteen thousand feet between himself and sea-level. Whatever the route, it is the same splendid spectacle. As one rises the view widens, towns and cities come into sight, the foot-hills appear, the plain grows ampler, distant peaks loom; until at last standing at the summit, there stretches at his feet a limitless ocean of plain, billowed and rolling for miles in all directions, lashed into storm where

the foot-hills and lower ranges appear, flecked with foam where the white villages break the dull colour of the plain, and everywhere charming the soul with a vision whose rapture is a thousand-fold compensation for the toilsome climb.

It is a faint picture of the rise of a soul out of narrowness and provincialism, out of prejudice and ignorance, up into knowledge and self-dignity, into service and victory, into glory and godhood.

Such was the climb which Simon Peter made, growing toward God in every struggle, rising into dignity and power with every hardship endured and every conflict fought; until at last standing upon the pinnacle of apostolic vision, he looked beyond the rim of mortal ken, and exclaimed, "I see new heavens and a new earth."

It was not accidental, and it did not all come in a day. There is much comfort to be derived from a study of Peter's career. He was so encouragingly faulty and so entirely human. He was ever making fatal blunders, attempting impossible feats, essaying inaccessible heights and falling into all but hopeless depths. Somehow, out of it all, he came to higher ground, and through it all, he rose into closer and more harmonious fellowship with him who had promised, "Thou shalt be."

The stages of Peter's religious development are marked, and the progress is upward and onward.

The first is the day Christ called him to be an

apostle.* He had never planned beyond his daily task. His highest ambition had been to beat yesterday's catch of fish, or outstrip a rival boat. His fathers had lived thus. Why should he look beyond the nets? One day the Christ called "Come, follow me." That opened his eyes. He caught the vision of life. He saw that he could do more than cast nets and catch fish. He could catch men. And so he left all and followed Jesus. That hour the rise of a soul began.

Just there is where it usually begins. It is the discovery that life is more than selling wares and making machines. It is a divine vocation. It is following God. It is tasting the powers of the world to come. When that hour comes, the soul cries for room. The shop cannot confine it longer.

The next stage in Simon's growth toward God was the day when Christ named him.†

There was a period during which he was coming to see that Jesus was divine. It was a gradual discovery. One day Jesus suddenly asked his disciples, "Who am I?" And instantly every taper of previous experience seemed to flame in Simon's soul. He saw what he had felt, and cried "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." Then Jesus named the unstable disciple "Rock," and declared that on this confession he would found his church.

Peter has risen high enough to see that his

*1st John 1:42. †Luke 9:20.

master is divine. At first he did not see it. Jesus was just an attractive leader. As the soul rises, the Godhood of Christ comes into view.

Peter is far from perfect, but he has a quenchless inspiration now, and an invincible leader.

A third stage is marked by that scene on the shore of Galilee after Christ's resurrection.*

It was the culmination of the period, during which the man was learning that love is the greatest thing in the world. The period was marked by some of the saddest and most humiliating incidents of Peter's experience. He had enjoyed transcendent privileges but had blundered ingloriously on the mount of transfiguration, upon the stormy lake, in agonied Gethsemane, in the garden, and at the hall of judgment.

How can the master ever care for him again? How can one who has denied his Lord, presume again to represent him? Now One is standing on the shore calling to the weary disciples in the boat. They peer through the gloom of the slowly breaking day to discern his identity. John says, "It is the Lord." Instantly Peter plunges into the sea. He is the first to kneel on the quiet beach, at the Saviour's feet.

All that Jesus asks is "Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me?" At last Peter makes the great discovery. It is not knowledge nor merit nor even faith. It is love that equips for service.

* John 21: 1-17.

There was a time when Christ's question would have meant little to Peter, because he had not risen high enough to see the realm it names. Now it means everything, and with a joy that sees what it says, Peter answers: "Yea Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

The day of Pentecost * marked another step in the mount toward greatness. It was the discovery of the true source of real power. From this time on Simon Peter's career shows the presence of a new and masterly influence. His first sermon brings 3,000 to Christ. Prison bars cannot hold him. He works miracles. His very shadow routs disease. He has risen to the level of Holy Ghost power. He is a long, long way from the dull days when all the strength he seemed to need was muscle enough to pull the nets.

A fifth stage is marked by the baptism of Cornelius. † It was the day of Peter's emancipation from Judaism. It was hard for him to rise above the conviction that Jehovah was a Jewish God, and that while he ruled all men, his chosen people enjoyed a monopoly of his favour. The vision of unclean beasts, the command "Rise and eat," and the knock of the servants of the gentile Cornelius at the door marked the passing of religious narrowness. Peter has risen high enough to see that no life is too unclean for Calvary to cleanse. All men have a claim on God's grace and a place

* Acts 2. † Acts 10.

in God's heart. Christ is a world-saviour and Christianity a world religion.

The failure to see this does not discount one's faith in Christ. It simply proves that one has not climbed far in the growth toward God. Because one is indifferent to missions and skeptical of the claims of the heathen world to gospel privilege and light, it does not follow that his faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is false. It merely indicates a limited religious experience. He is down among the foot-hills with his vision hemmed in a narrow valley, when he might be on the heights gazing at a world-view. That day he baptised Cornelius, Peter flung away his sect-creed and took the world into his heart.

Thus on and on he climbed out of littleness and ignorance out of weakness and prejudice, out of self-conceit and narrowness toward God, until an hour is reached away on the western sky. Martyrdom is on the horizon. Soon the aged apostle is to be put to death. He has no fear. He is living too close to God for earth to imperil his treasures. He sees the new heavens and the new earth. All the ages are his own. He has outgrown the temporal. As persecution sunders the flesh bond, the unfettered soul rises beyond the ken of mortal sight, and the man's growth toward God continues its ascent in the new heavens he now not merely beholds but tenants.

Thus did one man rise out of frail dust into victorious spirit. His story is a vision, in actual

human struggle, of the higher possibilities for every human life.

The way is long and hard. There is much to discourage, a poor start, wretched attainments, frequent falls, base denials, shameful apostacies, and such weariness that death sometimes seems a boon.

Over against it all is the fact of the soul's ascent. Life is not a product but a growth, and graces are fruits and not the out-put of a factory. The soul is not made perfect at a bound. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." *

The end does not appear at the beginning; but to him that presses on, the heights are given: until at last, with the summit of the delectable mountains beneath his feet, he is ravished with the apostolic vision. Before him, stretch the plains and cities of the invisible continent: above him bends the glory of a fadeless sky, and on his face flames the light of an eternal day.

* Mark 4: 28.

SHADOWS

" Long is the way,
And hard, that out of hell leads up to light."

—JOHN MILTON.

VII

THE TRAGEDY OF SIN

"What troubles the man is a confusion of the head arising from a corruption of the heart."—ROBERT BURNS.

THE vision of the rise of a soul is dimmed by mists and obscured by clouds. A shadow has fallen on human life, and its name is sin.

The stern voices of the actual and the practical bid us look not at what we may be but at what we are. The soul which essays the ascent of the altar stairs finds itself handicapped, and the struggle is beyond its strength.

Human nature is in ruins, and the surroundings are hostile to restoration. When one turns from contemplation of the vision to a sight of the facts, hope wanes and faith staggers.

Sin blocks the way. What is sin? How did it come? Why does it remain? These and a pack of similar questions shriek out their resentment against what is; but the facts change not. Sin abides and it must be reckoned with, and conquered if the rise of the soul be achieved. How can a sin-fettered soul rise to God-hood?

Sin is the tragic element in human life. It is

responsible for all human sorrow and suffering. Back of every uncomforted anguish and unassuaged grief is sin.

It is tragic in the story of its entrance into the world. Its entrance is the story of the lost Eden. It is tragic in the story of its cure. Its cure is the story of Calvary. It is tragic in the story of its experience. The Saviour has told that story in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is Christ's treatment of the problem of sin. It is original, unique, convincing and full of cheer. Christ does not argue the problem. He simply paints a picture, but when the brush is laid aside the task is complete.

The sinner sees himself, and also sees his God. Christ's treatment of sin is neither philosophical nor theological. He frames no definitions, propounds no dogmas. He is neither metaphysical nor doctrinal. He is pictorial and practical. But so long as a sin-weary soul struggles up the heights toward fellowship with the good and communion with God, the parable of the Prodigal Son will be more precious than all tomes of dogmatic divinity and all libraries of philosophical speculations.

Christ says nothing about "original sin" and "total depravity," although he was probably orthodox on these themes. He does not rehearse the story of the fall, nor particularise as to the relative heinousness of different sins. He does

not say in so many words that "sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God," * but as one looks at the picture, he feels that this faultless definition of the Westminster divines is terribly true.

Jesus tells the story of a human life across whose sky the clouds of sin have drifted, around whose life the gloom of sin has settled in a pall as black as death, until the prospect of recovering radiant heights seems gone forever, and the desolate despair of a doomed and depleted life can voice no plea save the confession "I have sinned."

As one reads the story he involuntarily says, "He is talking about me. He is telling the story of my wayward life. Mine is the face in the parable picture."

Jesus does not linger over the spectacle of an Eden lost some thousand years ago, nor grow sentimental over ruins of great historic interest to the modern dogmatist. He shows the lost Eden reënacted in present experience. With a pathos as sweet and tender as heaven's pity, he yearns over the ruin sin has wrought. Then he mends the broken chord in the harp of life, and breaks the silence with a morning song.

Dr. Watson in "The Mind of the Master" † calls the parable of the Prodigal Son a "drama." We may regard it as such, and arrange it in

* Westminster Shorter Catechism, ans'w.

† Mind of the Master, p. 101.

seven successive acts, each depicting a stage in the experience of the soul, and the whole setting forth with rapid movement and awful vividness the tragedy of sin.

The parable opens with a prologue in which Christ states the two moral extremes of the universe. He names them "home" and "the far country."

He paints a picture of heaven, and when he has finished, we behold home. Heaven is home-joy, home-rest, home-security, and home-love. It is an open door, a kindly roof, and somebody who cares.

He paints a picture of hell, and when he has finished we see the far country. Hell is exile. It is loneliness, friendlessness, cheerlessness, despair.

Heaven and hell, home and the far-country—these are the moral antipodes. Between these, every life moves. Under the fatal spell of sin, one turns his back on home and wanders into the far country. Then a moment when the old love shows its face through the shadows, and under the vision's magic spell, the prodigal forsakes the far country and seeks his father's house.

The first act in the tragedy may be called "The freedom of the human will." One is not compelled to abide in his father's house. God has dowered the human will with right of choice. He has projected human nature along the lines of free agency. The divine decrees instead of de-

stroying, establish human freedom. One thing which the Almighty has foreordained from all eternity is that when man confronts a moral issue, his will shall be free. To perplex the mind with the effort to explain the harmony between divine sovereignty and human freedom is to take up residence in a fog bank.

To ask why God made man capable of sinning is to ask why he made him at all.

We may wonder why God did not keep sin out when it came knocking at the door of his world. If he is all he claims, and sin is what he charges, why was not the arm of omnipotent love raised to defend the creature when sin crouched to spring? If he saw our peril, and loves us as a father loves his child, why does not God lay violent hands upon the prodigal and compel sinlessness?

Heaven is no prison house. It is home. It is not a place where one is kept in by bolts and chains. Its windows are open and its doors swing to the touch of love. If heaven is to be heaven, it must be the unfettered choice of an untramelled soul.

The second act in the drama is "Individualism."

Two brothers, with the same parentage, and the same environment are as far apart as the poles of the moral world. One is a steady stay-at-home, the other a prodigal and a vagabond. Temperaments differ. Heredity is something

and environment is something, but personality is something more than either. No two trees in the forest are precisely alike. No two members of the myriad human race are absolute counterparts. Individualism is an important element in the growth of the soul. It may become a club with which the soul is beaten into slavery, or a sceptre with which it rules in the empire of being.

"Wrong choice" is the third stage of the tragedy. A son deliberately turns his back on his father's house and prefers to have his own way. Wrong choice is the open door through which sin enters. Temptation is not sin, Christ was tempted. Sin is yielding to temptation.

Thomas à Kempis has distinguished these five steps in the progress of temptation,—base suggestion, mental picture, gloating pleasure, wicked inclination, consent. Sin starts when the soul gloats, with guilty pleasure, over the mental picture basely suggested.

Sin is choosing self's way instead of God's. The germ of a holy life is "God's will be done." The germ of a sinning life is "my will be done." It is an instant of transcendent meaning, as the will wavers at the parting of the ways. Destiny is the stake at issue. The difference between right and wrong choice is the difference between the rise and fall of the soul. The soul develops in the direction of its decisions.

"To-day we fashion destiny, the web of fate we spin,
To-day, for all eternity, choose we holiness or sin;
E'en now from snowy Gerizim or Ebal's cloudy crown,
We call the dews of blessing or the bolts of cursing down."

The fourth act is "Sin's mad career."

Wrong choice is succeeded by the moral downgrade. Manhood squanders itself in riotous living. This is the inevitable sequence of wrong choice. The bed of the current is a succession of rapids ending in a precipice. At this stage in the tragedy conscience is silenced, restraints are defied, recklessness takes the place of reflection, and the sanctities of life are trampled under foot. The soul is rushing down to perdition. The smash-up is at hand.

"Retribution" succeeds sin's mad career. The prodigal is sent out to feed swine. That is the smash-up. It is a pictorial representation of the disgrace and the wretchedness sin entails. It has been a fearful fall from swelldom to slumdom, from opulence to penury, from popularity to infamy, from the prince of good-fellows to a starved hireling, from the assembly of wealth and beauty to a swine-trough. Such is the wage of sin. Sin is the destructive force in human life. Its glamour may deceive for awhile, but sooner or later, with glamour gone sin stands disclosed in the naked hideousness of its foul reality, the foe of all the soul holds dear.

One meets daily the poor wretches, who would fain fill their bellies with the husks the swine eat. They are shiftless and indolent. They wear rags and shirk work. They say they have been unfortunate, and are the victims of heredity or environment. They would come nearer the truth if they would make confession their plea and say "I have sinned."

There would be no gospel if Christ had stopped here in his treatment of sin. Yet this is as far as man can go in his treatment of the subject. He can gather the facts, discover and discuss their results, but he cannot cure sin. He can name the shadow but he cannot drive it away. It takes a god to rift the leaden sky and scatter gloom with day. Because he is redeemer rather than philosopher or theologian, Christ follows retribution with repentance.

Repentance is the sixth act in the drama. "He came to himself." He saw his ruin. He discovered what he was. The pity is that sight had not come sooner. One must experience some things before he will be convinced. He must get to the black bottom of sin's despair before coming to his senses. The advantage of the swineherd's vocation is the facilities offered for meditation. Sin wins an easy victory over the thoughtless. The soul needs the quiet hour. A day's serious reflection may make an eternity of difference in the soul's destiny. When one "comes to him-

self," the gloom begins to lift and the vision of the soul's possibilities to break fair upon the sight.

The closing act in the tragedy is "Return." "I will arise and go to my father." That is salvation, for that is right choice, and right choice is salvation. True the prodigal is still far from his father's house. He is soiled, ragged, hungry; but the instant he says "I will arise and go to my father," the skies clear. The old joy is singing itself again in his soul. Home reality is only trudging some weary miles, and home cheer is already flooding his heart.

Heaven is not a robe of a certain fashion, a crown of a certain size, a harp of a certain gamut, and a long drawn out Sunday.

Heaven is the ineffable peace of a soul returning to the father. Temptation still assails and the marks of the fall abide, but heaven's gates are only trudging some weary miles along the pilgrim way; and heaven cheer already fills the heart.

Thus the drama which begins as a tragedy may end as a triumph. If so, while sin may obscure the way, it need not impede the rise of the soul whose search is for the father's house.

VIII

THE TAINT IN THE BLOOD

"It is the little rift within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And, ever widening, slowly silence all."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

THE sins of one generation may lame the next. It is a voice as ancient as Sinai, uttering a fact as old as creation, which declares: "I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." *

This is a law as remorseless as fate and a truth as impregnable as Gibraltar. It is a flaming protest from high heaven and a solemn warning from the throne of the eternal.

One has missed the mark in the interpretation of the law if he reads into it a vindictive God. Jealousy is a symptom of love. The commandment does not mean that God is going out of his way to punish. He does not delight in causing suffering. His way is not to lash into submission. God is merciful and his way is love. He does

* Ex. 20: 5.

not lay down an arbitrary rule, and then take his stand, like the old schoolmaster, with rod in hand to smite the instant the rule is broken. It were best to leave that view of God to the dark ages, and claim the clearer vision which shines for those who look.

The old Sinaitic warning is God's way of uncovering to human sight the awful consequences of violated law. He states one of the laws of being which can no more be broken with impunity than any other law.

God reminds man of that subtle law by which parental iniquity transmits its penalty from sire to son; and the infirmities caused by dissipation and excess assert themselves in the physical and moral decrepitude of posterity. Blood transports moral decay and mental degeneration. The taint in the blood is felt to the third and fourth generation.

One may damn his offspring. What he is or is not affects his descendants. A father may predispose his child or grandchild to kleptomania or alcoholism. A mother's dishonesty may decree her daughter's profligacy. Parental wickedness may predestinate filial crime. A man may make it difficult for his child to succeed in the struggle of life by sending him into the contest handicapped.

Children are what their parents are, not only in form and feature and mental habit, but also in the moral make-up. The carnal and the spiritual

are connected by a link that is stronger than death.

In Oakland, Cal., a surgical operation was performed on the skull of a ten year old boy to cure him of kleptomania. A blow on the head from a falling ax years before had produced the trouble. Heredity may also strike the blow which makes a mis-shapen skull and produces a moral pervert. Fathers and mothers may sound the knell of doom over the careers of their children.

A man is not the only sufferer for his sins. If he were, it would not be so bad. The drunkard reaps what he sows, to be sure. But the wife and children also reap part of the harvest of infamy and wretchedness from the same sowing. Part of the drunkard's penalty is a broken home. Part of it shows itself in the unsteady eye, sodden cheek, and low vitality of his neglected, sinned-against offspring; and in the forceless will and moral instability of those who were damned rather than born into the world. It is a ghastly fact, whose revelation is a trumpet protest against sin.

One may not mind retribution for himself, but what about his child? A mother said "Nothing has so restrained my life from sin as the second commandment—'Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.'"

Nevertheless it is a kind of responsibility that receives scant consideration. We are self-centred and conclude that when we have paid the

penalty the debt is cancelled. That is only the first instalment, and may be the smallest part. The penalty is entailed and the evidence of an unfaltering enforcement is too conspicuous to be denied.

God has deemed this law sufficiently large for a place in the ten great words. It ranks with "Thou shalt not kill," and "Thou shalt not steal." It is an integral part of the decalogue, and one of Jehovah's eternal interdicts.

Its vindication is shown by the similarity in form, features, facial expression and physical habits between parent and child. It is easy to tell whose child by the way the child walks, by his tricks of manner and expressions of countenance. His lineage betrays itself. But the body is the contour of the mind. The face is the window of the soul. A man's features are some indication of what he is. The bumps on his head are the registry of his mental characteristics.

The imitative tendency of child-life is another evidence of the law. A child tries to be like his parents. Nowhere is the power of example so strong. The explanation is that the ordinary imitative tendency has been reënforced by inherited traits. The child is already what the parent is. Nowhere does "what you are" speak so loud and "what you say" so low as in the training of child-life. A pilfering child is the offspring of a deceiving mother. Sometimes

when the child is flogged it is the parent that should be punished.

The pliableness of child-life makes it easy for the penalty of sire to land on son and there produce moral deformity. Children are shut up with their parents during the most plastic and formative period, just when example cuts deepest and instruction makes its most lasting impression.

A profane oath uttered in the presence of a grown-up man may not hurt him, but in the presence of a child it may lame for life his feeling of reverence. Deceive your neighbour and he may treat it only as what was to be expected, but deceive your trusting child and he must struggle for years to recover his lost faith. On one's own seared and toughened conscience, the ridicule of religion and flippant treatment of prayer may rest lightly, but to the sweet, fresh soul of child-life it is the pestilential breath of spiritual death. A boy's ideal is his father. Because that is a fact based on a fundamental law, a father's iniquity is visited upon his children.

Perhaps a more striking evidence of the taint in the blood is in heredity. It is a pitiful story which comes from prisons, pauper homes, and insane asylums. Scientific investigation has demonstrated that heredity is largely responsible for the existence of these three chambers of horror. The taint has descended in the blood. To change the criminal and cure the idiot, treatment must go back three generations.

Another striking illustration of the subject is the notorious transmission or entailment of tendencies to certain diseases, such as scrofula and tuberculosis. Here one's family physician must reveal the peril and proclaim the warning. Suffice it to say that it is but another way God has of thundering forth an old commandment; another voice by which he warns the man who would lay his hand to sin.

This is the sinfulness of some sins. They destroy the race. They imperil the future and are in open rebellion against that majestic hour when God said, "Let us make man in our image."

A gentleman said "I don't drink intoxicants, not because I think tippling a sin, but because my system can't stand it." Is not that sin enough? Is it a harmless thing to take the body, faultless and, next to the immortal soul, the supreme triumph of God's creative skill, and batter it with sin and defile it with iniquity and debauch it with excess until its repulsive, loathsome, moral rottenness spreads the taint of diseased blood through three successive generations? Every man, in a sense, stands just where Adam did. The future of the race is in his keeping. One may not subscribe to the dogma of original sin, but he cannot deny the doctrine of originating sin. That was the curse of the fall, and it is a similar curse which every sin visits upon posterity. One's iniquity originates sin and those who come after suffer the consequences. A man cannot

dam up the penalty of his sin in his own life. Easier is it to dam up the sweep of a continental river or to stop the mad plunge of a mountain boulder.

God takes up this tremendous fact and uses it as plea and argument for a holy life. He asks a man to think of those who are dependent upon him. When tempted to sin, he bids him remember his child. What does it profit him if he gains the whole world and damns his boy?

Parents are wondering how they may shield their child from temptations out in the world. The gravest dangers are those which confront him before he reaches the world. They bewail the fact that the church or the Sunday school has lost their boy. Maybe the church never had their boy to lose. He was lost before he reached the church, lost in sight of home, and lost because those who loved him best destroyed his chance. God has bound the family with the golden leash of love. The dearest child in all the world is yours. Why not another? Why may we not love our neighbour's boy as dearly as our own? He is every bit as lovable in himself. The reason is because our own needs us most. We have the making of his future, and parental love is God's plea for the future weal of child-life.

One summer morning on a train which was about to pull out from Washington City I sat in a seat next to that occupied by a middle-aged man and a twelve-year old boy. The lad was going

away from home, and the father was there to see him off and to say "good-bye." They were talking together about the separation. The man took out his purse and selecting some coins said: "I am afraid you haven't quite enough, take this too." After a little while he said: "My boy, I must leave you now." Then, leaning over, with the back of the seat to shield a bit from the public gaze, a father told his boy "good-bye." Out on the platform, at the car window, the man lingered. Again he took some money from his purse and gave it to the lad saying, "I want you to be sure to have enough." Not until the trainmen cried "All aboard," and the long line of cars pulled out did those two separate, and when they did it was looking the length of the platform into each other's eyes.

My boy will be taking the train some day. I cannot keep him with me always. Shall I send him out well provided, clean of limb, pure of heart, high of soul? Am I "making sure that he shall have enough?"

Or is there a limp in the soul because there is a taint in the blood?

God is calling, in the voices which prattle around the table; in the little tots that climb upon our knees; in the child arms which slip their love-links around our necks; and in the fresh, innocent lips that press ours with kisses.

All of this is a divine plea. It is heaven's call to a high life. It is the beautiful way the God of

the covenant has of saying, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." *

* Acts 16: 31.

IX

THE SINS OF THE IMAGINATION

"He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit in the centre and enjoy bright day;
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the midday sun."

JOHN MILTON.

AMONG the hindrances which impede the soul in its effort to climb to the ampler airs and fairer lights of a higher life are the sins of the imagination.

We are familiar enough with sin in the open. Its appearance in the violation of moral law is commonplace. Its evidence in the hereditary taint transmitted from parent to offspring is a scientific fact so well established as to need but statement and warning. But sin has yet another lair, so secret that it often escapes detection, but so dangerous that the red light should be hung where all can see the warning.

This deadly, invisible lair of sin is in the imagination.

During a pastorate in Nashville, Tenn., the writer received a letter from a physician * of that

* Dr. Ja's D. Plunket.

city, calling attention to this fact. The following extracts from the letter clearly and forcibly state the issue:

"Through a lifetime attendance upon the preached word I now fail to recall a sermon in which the sins of the imagination were pointedly and faithfully elaborated. Books are mainly silent upon the subject. Fathers and mothers faithful in all things else shrink from the administration of counsels upon matters which they would fain believe are all unknown to their offspring, which has been so tenderly nurtured. Yet, in an unguarded moment an impure word, a doubtful jest, a tale of sin is drunk in by those fresh souls, which excites the imagination and straightway they discover the field of contemplation, so full of danger and of death, and learn all its paths before they know anything of the perils to which they subject themselves; and sooner or later in life find out that from all willing dalliance with temptation and unresisted entertainment of unworthy and impure imaginations, their character has suffered an injury which untold ages will fail to remedy.

"In this enchanted middle ground between virtue and vice doubtless there is many a soul which lives and feeds in secret and takes its payment there for the restraint and mortification of its outward life. This realm of temptation is to a multitude of minds one of the most seductive in which their feet ever wander. Men and women

who lead faultless outward lives, who have no intention to sin, who yield their judgment, if not their conscience to the motive of self restraint resort in secret to this field of temptation and seek among its excitements for the flower, at least, of the sins which they have discarded; and to meet and commune with the images beautiful but impure of the hidden things that lie beyond. In fact I have sometimes thought that there were men and women who were really more in love with temptation than with sin, who by genuine experience had learned that feasts of imagination were sweeter than feasts of sense. Whether this be the case or not I have no doubt that the love of temptation for the excitement which it brings is very general even with those whom we esteem as patterns of virtue. The surrender of the soul to these excitements is the more dangerous from the fact that by some sort of sensual sophistry they are conceived to be harmless and without the pale of actual sin. There is no intention to sin, but only to attempt to filch from sin all the pleasures that can be procured without its penalty. Playing with the temptation to sin is doubtless accompanied with less apparent disaster than the actual commission of it, and so far, is a smaller evil but it is an evil and essentially a sin. The man who lives and seeks the excitement of temptation shows that he is restrained from sin by fear and not by principle, that while his life is on the side of virtue his affections lean

to vice. This is a sham life and a mean life. There are many to whom temptation comes from the forbidden world of sin but it comes unbidden and unwelcome on the lines of old appetites and passions not yet thoroughly under control, and it is fought against and driven out. It is the voluntary going out of the soul after temptation as a kind of unforbidden good that I challenge and question. It is the willing secret sin of imagination that I denounce as not only a sin essentially in itself but as the path over which every soul naturally travels to the overt act of transgression which lies beyond."

The sins of the imagination hide under cover. They are secret infamies. They inhabit the under world, hugging the darkness and cloaking with concealment; but they are all the more dangerous to the soul, because so subtle.

That the subject may be intelligently studied, there must be an adequate and clear apprehension of the functions of the imagination.

It possesses a strange and wonderful power. It is the creative and constructive faculty of the human mind. It waves the wand of memory over past sights and sentiments, and peoples consciousness with moving figures and audible voices. By the magic of fancy it strikes in upon the nervous system the same impressions which real objects produce. Imagination also feasts, by anticipation, on the future, and experiences pleasures yet unborn. One may betake himself to

solitude, and yet by the potent spell of imagination, he may go through the varied experiences of the crowded street, and people his hermit's close with the noise and jostle of the throng. In imagination one may climb mountains, cross seas, fight battles, and win victories or suffer defeats. Dreams are but fancy stalking sleepless through the chambers of the imagination.

The soul beggars its destiny when it leases the splendid palace of imagination to sin, and allows it to be tenanted by filthy thoughts, diseased and depraved lusts and base passions, until it reeks with creations loathsome and prostitute, whose turpitude is none the less black because concealed, and whose defilement is all the more serious for not appearing on the surface.

The sins of the imagination exist whenever the creative faculty of the mind is in the employment of evil; when the pictures painted are salacious, the fruit eaten is forbidden, the words heard and the sights seen are such as could not live with decency in the open.

That there are such sins, one needs only to look within to discover. Conscience is witness enough for this arraignment. If further proof be needed, it is furnished in the close watch kept on vaulted chambers, where thoughts reside, whose very existence we hide from all men. Could some more wonderful than the Rœntgen ray be discovered whose light could photograph the inner life, it would make cowards of all.

Through every mind, pass fancies and desires one would not disclose to his dearest friend.

Nevertheless it is a widespread impression that the sins of the imagination are not so much sins as indiscretions, and that the only penalty for their indulgence is the disgrace and humiliation which attend their exposure.

In favour of this, it is urged that there is no overt act and hence no actual transgression. But sin starts before the overt act is committed. It is a profounder analysis of sin which traces its source behind the outward deed to the heart's intent. One may break the ninth commandment without telling a lie. One may be profane without swearing, and a murderer without taking the life of his fellow. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

It is also sought to make light of the sins of the imagination by the plea that the hurt they do is confined to the agent. There is no injury to society and no wrong to one's neighbour. In one sense this is true, and to such an extent the turpitude of the offence is diminished. There are sins which damn only the individual sinning. Is not that something? Is it a harmless thing for one to destroy himself? Indeed, in the long run, a sin against self is a sin against society, inasmuch as the verb "to be" precedes the verb "to do."

A further apology is the excuse that sins of the imagination are unavoidable. They come unsolicited and people the soul with uninvited

guests. A temptation which cannot be avoided is no crime. This excuse has a measure of merit, for there are temptations which imperil the soul and for whose existence the soul is not responsible. There are untamed vices that spring like wild beasts from their lair. There are serpents of sin which dart poisoned fangs from places of concealment.

When such assaults are made, it is the soul's duty to resist. It must summon all the moral strength it can muster and fight the tempter. Nevertheless, as the letter already quoted indicates, it is not this class of temptations to which reference is now had. The sins of the imagination arise from the willing and deliberate entertainment of temptation. It is the soul picturing to itself the illicit pleasures which would be enjoyed, were temptation indulged. It is the enjoyment of base and hurtful lusts through contemplation. It is the prostitution of the imagination to the service of unclean passions, and doing in the secret chambers that which would be infamous and abominable if practiced openly.

Such sins are penalty imposing. God pronounces against them. He has catalogued the sins of the imagination as sins and not as indiscretions. The writer of the Proverbs has declared the infamy of "the heart that deviseth wicked imaginations." * In the text this expression stands central in a list of seven spiritual

* Prov. 6: 18.

diseases. The first three are "a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood." The last three are "feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." At the core of this catalog of loathsome, repulsive moral rottenness is "a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations." God is on the side of all that is right, and against all that is wrong. He is the author of soul-being, and his knowledge of the laws which govern its development is accurate. Better than any other's is his warning of the things which hinder its rise and progress.

The fact that God proclaims against evil imaginations is sufficient exposure of the peril. There are other considerations which make the peril more apparent.

The sins of the imagination are a surrender to temptation in its most insidious form. That the temptation is real, conscience affirms. Whatever reason may say about it, the moral nature rises up in alarm and declares that there is an enemy at the door. The temptation may have the face of a friend, but it carries a dirk in its sleeve with which to stab purity and assassinate virtue. The only way to meet such an enemy is with the death-grapple. Dalliance is defeat. Sampson with his head in the lap of Delilah is the picture of a strong soul yielding to the soft seductions of an evil imagination.

Sins of the imagination are the prostitution of the crowning glory of the mind. Men of genius are men of imagination. It is the imperial faculty of the soul. It is the divinity in man commanding a world from nothing. Nowhere is the human soul so close to the creative-hour which said "Let there be light," as when imagination flames. Through it the noblest spirits of the race have delivered their message. Poets like Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespere, Tennyson, Browning; artists like Raphael, Titian, Coreggio, Turner; sculptors, orators, actors, preachers, have achieved their most splendid triumphs by the power of imagination.

Its room is the throne-chamber of the soul. What degradation to infest it with the vermin of depraved lusts, to hang its walls with impure pictures, to furnish it with the statuary of vice and perverted passions, until it becomes the revel chamber of bacchanalian voluptuousness, whose secret follies would be crying infamies in the open, but where seductive lips whisper: "Bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

The sins of the imagination traverse the same path through the nerve centres, as would be taken by the open and overt transgressions of which they are the counterpart. The pleasure is a guilty pleasure. A sinful deed goes through the soul like a besom of destruction. It tears up virtue by the roots, and leaves its course marked by ruin. A sinful imagination follows the same track. It

touches the same nerves, duplicates the identical sensations, and as surely produces the same moral ruin.

The soul that has fallen victim to this kind of sin is like a well whose surface waters may be crystal, but whose depths are foul with filth and baleful with the poisonous germs of deadly disease. It is the sin which undermines manhood and destroys character. Sometimes a life, outwardly fair and reputed upright, goes down in sudden moral collapse. The public is perplexed to explain so complete a fall from virtue's heights. The explanation is often an imagination that has surrendered itself to secret feasting on the pleasures of immorality.

Sometimes one comes upon a fallen tree in the tropics, which at a kick or a blow, pulverises. Those little insects, the borers, have permeated the tree in all its parts, and while allowing it to retain its outward form, have changed it from fibre to dust.

What the borers do to the tree the sins of the imagination do to character. They destroy its fibre. They eat out the moral stamina of the soul, until in the stress of some sharp and sudden temptation, manhood pulverises.

When some pattern of virtue falls, some trusted model of morality turns defaulter, it is not just to conclude that every man has his price, and that morality is a fiction, religion a sham, the church a fraud, and reputation a trick. It would be

nearer the facts to conclude that lust is paying the inevitable penalty for secret dalliance with vice. The sins of an evil imagination have undermined the foundations of virtue, and the fabric of character has crashed in ruins.

The cure for a diseased imagination may be stated in three words, prevention, substitution, creation.

There must be prevention. The imagination works largely on previously acquired material. It may be seriously questioned whether it originates anything beyond the grouping of that which has come to it through inward and outward perceptions. Hence arises the immense importance of excluding from the mind all that would contaminate. Nothing is more false than the notion that the best equipment with which to fight sin is an experience of it. It is best never to sow wild oats. There is a corrosion of vulgarity that will not wash off. A man once confessed to the writer that, while a soldier in the army he had heard an obscene song, whose vile suggestions he had never been able to shake off. He said that sometimes while on his knees in prayer, that filthy song would rise into consciousness and defile the very atmosphere of worship. To seek the haunts of sin, to look with open eyes upon its naked and uncovered infamy, to embrace it, in order to escape it, is to be led a willing captive into the lowest dungeon of castle Despair. Erotic books and salacious pictures are the devil's tools. There is an ignorance

which is altogether sane, and a knowledge which is folly.

A writer in a religious journal says:

"In the hotbed of modern society, there is a tendency to prejudice growth. Precocious virtue is bad enough, but precocious vice is most monstrous. The children on our streets grow old before their time. There is no fate more horrible, because none more hopeless. Were it not for the influx of new life from the farms, our cities would be depopulated. Strive as we may we cannot save our children from the corrosion of vulgarity and obscene suggestion.

"The subtle incitement to vice comes to every home. Its effect is shown in precocious knowledge, the loss of the bloom of youth, the quest for pleasures unearned because sought for out of time. Vulgarity has in some measure its foundation in precocity. We find the corrosion of vulgarity everywhere, and its poison enters every home. The streets of our cities are covered with its evidence, our newspapers are redolent with it, our story books reek with it, our schools are tainted by it."

The gravest charge against the modern stage is that it is largely prostituted to depraved and immoral suggestions. A popular actress has declared that no play may hope for success before an American audience that is not sufficiently characterised by the word "immoral." *

* Olga Nethersole.

In the presence of so much that contaminates, the only thing left is to close the windows and barricade the door.

If prevention is efficient it must go further. The sanest prevention is substitution. The good must crowd out the bad. Virtue must displace vice. Light must shine away darkness. Physical vigour is better than a drug-shop in the struggle with disease. Morality requests a sound body, a clear mind, and pure surroundings. There is needed the help of good books, healthful amusements, and decent ideals. The golf-links and the gymnasium are factors in the saving of the soul. A morbid mind is congenial soil for a diseased imagination, and many a life has found the open air and the glow and vigour of physical exercise an escape from the phantom of temptation. There is needed also the kindly, sensible, and timely unfolding to the opening life, of the profound secrets of being.

Then to all else there must be added the work of One who said "Ye must be born again."* To prevention and substitution there must be added creation. Man needs a new heart, and that is God's gift. When Jesus takes up his residence in the soul the house must be clean. When he becomes the reigning ideal of the life, the sins of the imagination must go. They cannot dwell under the same roof with Christ.

A long time ago a man whom God loved awoke

*Jno. 3:7.

to the fact that he had taken this viper, an evil imagination, into his bosom, and that its deadly fang had sent the poison into his whole life, until he stood revealed to himself murderer and adulterer. In his shame and degradation he said: "I was shapen in iniquity," and in his extremity he cried out to God: "Create in me a clean heart."

For the soul that is struggling against the tempter, and fighting the spectral demons of a diseased imagination which oppose the soul in its effort to climb to heights of sweetness and light, the deepest, strongest and most abiding need is that which finds its voice in David's prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." *

* Ps. 51: 10.

X

THE MAN WHO ENDS IN HIMSELF

"Self-seeking has no centennial."
BENJAMIN HARRISON.

"I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."
ALFRED TENNYSON.

SELFISHNESS is the subtlest form of sin, and a hindrance, as effective as it is frequent, to the rise of the soul. It is the negation of God. It is the substitution of ego for deus.

Perhaps the most common failure to achieve spiritual growth is not his who is a sinner in the eyes of the law, nor his who is cursed by some hereditary taint, nor his whose imagination is given over to evil, but his who ends in himself. He has entered the fatal cul de sac, where life is without prospect.

An ancient Hebrew prophet in reciting the downfall of his nation said: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." * It

* Hos. 10: 1.

is a severe and scathing arraignment. The people are hauled up before the bar of decent public sentiment, and condemned as good for nothing. They are summoned before the tribunal of high heaven and convicted of unqualified worthlessness.

The charge is not that the nation is either inactive or unfruitful. There is conspicuous energy and, to all appearances, rapid growth and boundless prosperity. Israel is a luxuriant vine. With prodigality of growth it seems to be meeting every expectation. The fruit-freighted vine covers the earth and gives promise of abundant harvest.

The condemnation is that the nation ends in itself. The vine puts off its fruits before they are ripe. The people are self-centred. They have surrounded themselves with barriers of religious exclusiveness, and imagined that God was a Hebrew monopoly.

They had every reason to put self last. All they had, they were given. From slavery they had come, through marvels of grace and miracles of love. Despite all this they have dwindled down into nothing but a nation of egotists, with no thought beyond their own name and no effort beyond their cramped court.

"Israel is an empty vine." It is a pictorial denunciation of selfishness, and has a wide range of application.

Any nation in any age that ends in itself limits its destiny. People are tempted to believe that

they are scoring the goal and measuring the highest mark of success when their activity is great, and their bulk impressive. Nations are prone to be selfish and phrase the universe in terms of "our trade," "our army," "our flag," "our revenues."

This is harmless, provided above "our trade and flag" is placed the highest weal of humanity. No nation can be truly and permanently great which terminates in itself. History is replete with illustrations of national collapse brought about by a selfish policy. Spain is a notable example in recent times.

America is a luxuriant vine. Its growth has been phenomenal, but its chief business is not to preserve itself. It must bear fruit for the sustenance of mankind, which simply means that it must share its blessings with the race, and bear its part in carrying world-burdens. It cannot expect the other nations of the world to do its police duties. If the American nation ever disintegrates, it will not be because of any task it has assumed, in either Western or Eastern hemisphere, for the good of the race. America's chief end is not to preserve itself.

In the twentieth century morning a young national giant stands forth in the Western world, lusty of arm, broad of shoulder, clear of eye and stout of heart. Across the sea, among distant island people, there are burdens to be lifted. Ignorance, slavery, and many human wrongs are

there; while here is Liberty. Shall America strike the fetters and shine the light; or shall we whine over possible perils to ourselves as we confront world-duties? Is human bondage less wrong now than it was in sixty-one? America's working days for the human race are not over. Our chief peril is national egotism.

The same law arraigns any organisation, commercial, industrial, social or religious, which ends in itself and has no scheme wider than its own prosperity. The commercialism which is willing to win regardless of whether others are helped or hurt, forfeits respect. Trade may scoff at this and brand it as sentimental. Trade is practical and puffs out its lips with "business is business." What does trade care for the beatitudes and the golden rule? Commercialism is no charity organisation.

"And the kilns and the curt-tongued mills say, 'Go,
There's plenty that can if you can't; we know.
Move out if you think you're underpaid,
The poor are prolific; we're not afraid;
Trade is trade.'" *

Nevertheless the organisation which ends in itself is good for nothing, judged by the only standard that lasts.

Trusts have their legitimate place in the evolution of trade. When properly managed they

* Sidney Lanier.

are advantageous both to producer and consumer. But the trust, incited by sordid selfishness, that despises the rights of others, has unsheathed a sword which will decapitate itself.

Trades-Unions are legitimate. Labour has a right to protect itself. In the unequal struggle with capital, it is not strange that labour sometimes makes self-preservation the chief end of being. But labour-organisations must be careful that their sympathies are not bounded by their roll-call.

All this is preëminently true of the organisation known as the church. The church which exists only for itself is doomed. Religion deals with life in its entirety, and the church which lives inside its little sectarian wall, pipes its thin denominational lay, pines only for congregational success, unmindful of the wider stretches of truth and the larger claims of humanity, dishonours the Christ it pretends to follow and denies the gospel it professes to proclaim.

Inasmuch as the unit in state and church, in trade and society is the individual, the law drives home to him and recites the infamy of the man who ends in himself. It is not enough to be a luxuriant grower in the world-field of human activity. Whether one be worth much or little, it is the sign of a degenerate to seek only self-glorification. It is not enough to be shrewd, energetic, prosperous. Man's chief end is not to

make a profitable investment and enjoy it forever. The main thing is not what one may have, but what is his life-attitude; what is his centre. Is his field circumscribed by the geographical limits of "His Majesty Myself," or does the domain of his concern embrace his neighbour? No man can become great who thinks only of himself. Selfishness breaks the circuit between the soul and Godhood.

The warning is not against self-care and the appeal is not for self-neglect. Of course one must be, in order to do. There is no strength in a rope of sand, and no ballast in a wind-bag.

That "sect of socialists" who propose to lift up by levelling down are as careless of the facts as they are anxious for their neighbour's goods. Poverty is not to be cured by the punishment of thrift.

Neither is the arraignment of selfishness a wholesale denunciation of human nature. There is a deal of pious drivel that exhausts itself in declaiming the short-comings of the natural man. The crowning product of the Creator is a human being. Human nature possesses a dignity not excelled save by divine. It is endowed with capacities for growth and service which pale the destiny of angels.

The need is to give all this noble passion of human nature the right of way. The cry of the soul for immortality, for peace and power and victory, is not a bad cry. It is not wrong to

seek its fulfilment. Selfishness is no plea for self-abasement.

Man is God's offspring and ranks at the summit of creation.

But man must not become his own god. He must not mistake egotism for deism, nor conclude that he has reached the goal when he has seen his feet. One has not exhausted the study of his subject when he has asked: "What will be the effect on me?" He must get beyond his little, narrow, confined, cramped, coffined, contracted, shallow, selfish self.

Even God does not end in himself. Sometimes he is caricatured as deified egotism. Some theologians make the mistake of the little child who was trying to answer the catechism which declares that "God makes, preserves, and keeps us." She unconsciously read herself into the subject and changing the phraseology to suit a child's view of the situation answered: "God makes preserves—and keeps them."

God is sometimes represented as looking out only for himself. If egotism could anywhere be justified it would be in flawless divinity, but the Scriptures represent God as leading anything but a selfish life. Every experience of the creature strikes its impression on the heart-strings of God. The struggle of the world is the heart-life of the great Father. Nothing falls outside his love and care. For the least and feeblest creatures, for the worm that burrows the dark earth, as well as

for the solar-system that sweeps the dim-lit stretches of infinite space, it is a safer and a kinder world because God is.

A great soul must be set in the key of God. The zone of its love and care must be wider than self.

The goal of life's endeavour must be located outside self. It must be found in God, and Jesus has taught that God is to be found in those who are in need.

Self is too small a goal. The man who ends in himself has no outlet. He is like a railway company that would build a trunk line into a pocket. He lacks terminal facilities.

Selfishness is the suicide of greatness. It is mean and small and contemptible. It is life's distemper. It reverses the machinery of the soul and sets it grinding on itself. It is the insanity of existence, the apostacy of being, the defeat of opportunity, and the downfall of the soul.

"Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of self, that trembling, passed in music out of sight." *

* Alfred Tennyson.

ASCENT

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see
all nor be afraid!"

ROBERT BROWNING in *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

XI

GOD BELIEVES IN US

"All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped." *From Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

THE rise of a soul is a religious experience. The ascent is toward God, and the climb is a spiritual struggle. The problem is not so much educational or social, as it is moral. The task is not for reformer, statesman, philanthropist. It is the prophet's problem, and his work is to bring the soul into contact with God and keep it under the influence of religious truth.

The first fact that needs to be apprehended is that God is the soul's friend and steadfast and sufficient helper in every step and struggle of the upward and onward way.

Much time and thought are spent in the endeavour to ascertain whether or not God may be trusted. Books are written, lectureships are founded, scholarship is laid under tribute, and discussion is animated and prolonged.

May man believe God? Is the Almighty reliable? Is Jehovah trustworthy?

The real problem is not whether we may believe in God, but whether God believes in us. It is not seemly for a rush light flickering its fitful flame in the face of the blazing Sun at noon, to ask of the king of day: "Are you there? Are you shining?" It is not altogether modest for a glow-worm to undertake the censorship of the stars. It is not entirely in keeping with the eternal fitness of things for a snail to be pace-setter for a locomotive. God above us, beneath us, around us, within us! God everywhere and invincible! The supreme question is not what I may think of him, but what he thinks of me. What is that? What does God think of us? Does he believe in us? With the Bible at hand one may affirm that he does. Standing within sound and reach of Calvary it is not arrogance to claim nor fanaticism to believe that God has faith in the immortal possibilities of a human soul.

Isaiah's prophetic struggle was to find whether, in spite of all their infidelity, Israel's God could still care for his people. In the earlier chapters he sets forth their shortcomings with an unsparing hand. It is an ugly story. At last the clouds break and through the rift he sees a Father's face. God has not turned his back on Israel. From the topmost heights of prophetic rapture, Isaiah shouts the news of coming dawn to a shadowed and dismayed nation.

At the climax of his thrilling message the prophet of the Messiah exclaims:

"The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." *

It is a promise that was old when the world was young and that will be young when the world has reached its final sunset. It is a promise that drops down to the deepest depths of human need, and bearing in its arms the priceless treasure of a rescued life, mounts up to the sublime heights of permanent safety and peace.

"The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed." The mountains are the landmarks of the ages. The hills are the landscape of the continents. Together they stand for the order and beauty of the world. Order may yield to chaos, beauty go back to dust, but God's kindness to man abides, and his covenant of peace is eternal.

The dogma worshipper may find fault with the way the theme is phrased. He is not fond of saying that "God believes in us." Indeed he is fond of saying just the opposite. His primary positions are original sin and total depravity. His favourite proof-texts proclaim the instability and deceit of fallen human nature. His fundamental position is that since Salvation is all grace, man must be all disgrace.

The dogmatist is of course sound. He is nothing if not sound. Human nature is very unreliable and untrustworthy. The heart is de-

* Isai. 54 : 10.

ceitful above all things and desperately wicked. There is no intention of portraying wingless saints as the objects of divine confidence. Let the picture of the sinner be painted as black as the exigencies of dogma may demand. One need not care to change the tones. But he may affirm that spite of all this, God believes in us. He knows us through and through. We cannot hide our rottenness from him, but the glory is that, in the face of all our wretched wavering and waywardness, God says "My kindness shall not depart, the covenant of my peace shall not be removed."

It does not greatly help a man to brand him. Call him a "scoundrel" and you have probably only incurred his hatred. Charge him with crime or cowardice, and he will kill you or demand proof, according to his code. Take him by the hand, in a kindly human way and say "Maybe you have fallen far and gone often astray; but I believe in you still. I have confidence in you and believe you can recover your lost honour." Then the angels of hope begin to sing again in a prodigal's heart. That is God's way of helping up. He does not cudgel with denunciation nor cover with abuse. He comes as Jesus did to that sinning woman at Jacob's well so long ago. Christ knew her moral defilement but he did not say it out in words, until she knew that he was her friend. As Jesus sat thus on the wall, he said to a woman whose touch was moral taint:

"Give me to drink." * Thus God overcomes. He is saying to the fallen and undeserving: "Give me to drink. I am thirsty and you can refresh me, tired and you can rest me. Fallen, wayward prodigal, you can glorify your God." With that message hope is again vocal in the heart, and morning joy flushes all the sky.

Perhaps it would be well to define just what is meant by the subject. It does not mean that God believes in all that we are. How could he and be a holy God? Our thoughts are evil and our ways are sinful. We are much of that on which God must wage a truceless war.

Neither does it mean that he believes in all that we do. How could he and stand by the ten commandments? We do those things which we ought not to do and we leave undone those things which we should do. God can never wink at the violation of law.

"In vain we call old notions fudge,
And bend our conscience to our dealing;
The ten commandments will not budge,
And stealing will continue stealing." †

Neither does it mean that God believes in all that we profess. Our profession is often better than our practice, but God is not deceived. He is not blind to moral distinctions. He is eternally and uncompromisingly against sin. Our hope is

* Jno. 4:7. † James Russell Lowell.

not that God has revised Sinai, but that against all that is wrong is still found the righteous wrath and limitless condemnation of the Almighty.

If God believes in us, but does not believe in what we are or do or profess, what does the theme stand for? It stands for the divine possibilities of an immortal soul.

God believes in what the soul may become. He believes in its future; not in fallen, dethroned, imbruted and besotted life; but in rescued, redeemed, re-enthroned, exalted and glorified life. He believes that he can restore the ruin. He sees not disabilities but possibilities.

God does not give us up because we are bad. The church need never revise that out of the creed. God does not cast a man off because he is wayward. It is not God's way, and never has been. Israel was as wayward as was ever any people. Her law-giver was a murderer, the author of her hymnology was an adulterer and, as Gerald Stanley Lee says, her greatest king wrote the Proverbs because he could not keep them. Yet God believed in the possibilities of the chosen people and persevered until from the Hebrew race came the Saviour of the world.

God believes in the ideal rather than the real. The real is not much, the ideal is everything. A single grain of wheat held in a straw cup is the real. It will make a breakfast for a sparrow. It is not much. But when one thinks of the ideal of

that wheat seed there rises before him the vision of waving fields of golden grain, enough to feed the hunger of the world.

God believes in the ideal. When he thought of us first, it was not the picture of a marred and reprobate life that the Great Father carried in his heart. While sin has come between him and his dream God is pressing on toward its fulfilment, sustained by the sublime faith that the soul may become one day as beautiful as it was when God dreamt it into being.

The proof of God's faith in the soul's sublime possibilities is in all his dealings.

It is in that majestic hour when he said "Let us make man in our image." Why start the race on its perilous journey, if he did not believe in its possibilities?

It is in the pages of an old Book, which the best of men reverence as divine, and where God reveals himself to his people. Why give us a revelation if he did not believe in us?

It is at the cross and in all that gathers there. Why Calvary, if God has no faith in man?

If he does not believe in us why does he strive by his Spirit, plead in his providences, and follow with a love that all nights cannot obscure, nor all winters chill?

The dogmatist, however, is still with the opposition. He admits that all this is true, but only of a limited and select number. He is willing to concede that God believes in the elect, but denies

that God is the Father of all men. He insists that there is a future only for those who accept Jesus Christ. Once more the dogmatist is sound but the truth may be stated differently. While it is true that only those who accept Christ and yield themselves to God, can experience him as a father, it is also true that God wants to treat all as his children and will if only they will let him. He has not hedged himself off from any creature. He is for all. One proof of it is the sweeping Gospel invitation: "Ho every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters."* After proclaiming God's faith in us Isaiah seems to say, "You cannot limit God's love. He is for all. If you have nothing but your thirst to commend you, God believes in you. If you are all ragged and tattered and in want, come for God believes in you. Come just as you are, without money and without price."

Whoever the man, however far astray, however low down in sin he may have fallen, God can restore. He can set him on his feet. He can lift him up out of the mire of sin, into decency and respectability, into peace and joy, up above the stars, beyond angels, past seraphim and cherubim, up into the glow and glory where he shall see the King in his beauty and become what he beholds.

This is Christianity and all that would cry it down, dishonours God. If all this be true, the

*Isaiah 55: 1.

sin-ruined soul can rise. Maybe friends have lost faith in him, and the church has lost faith in him, and he has lost faith in himself; but if God still believes in him, he need not despair.

There is no pit of deception in the human heart God has not sounded, no corner of immorality he has not explored; but the glorious fact is that despite all this God believes in us.

This is a man's salvation. He is saved by faith; not by his faith in himself, and not merely by his faith in God, but primarily by God's faith in him. The estranged child is won home not by abuse and denunciation, but by the matchless charm of honest, patient, unaffected sympathy.

Not the gospel of doubt but the gospel of confidence is the hope of the world. People are better than they seem to be. In every life there is a Saint's chamber with an angel tenant. Only the hand of faith with the key of love can unlock the door.

God is love and his knock is at the door. He believes in us.

As long as his strength lasts, we need not faint; as long as his hope survives, we need not falter; as long as his love is ours we cannot be poor; and as long as he believes in us, we may attempt the altar stairs.

XII

THE ATONEMENT

"Rejoice we are allied
To that which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I
must believe."

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

THE second fact to consider in the soul's ascent is the divine plan for its emancipation from sin. The plan centres in the Atonement.

The atonement is God's cure for sin. It lifts the gloom and scatters the clouds.

Over against the tragedy of sin Christianity places the greater tragedy of sin's atonement. The atonement assumes that in his natural estate man is not on friendly terms with God. He tries to get rid of the thought of God. He fears, shuns, doubts, hates the invisible power whose invincible rule is announced. God is a menace to man's peace, a dark cloud on life's horizon, shadowing existence with an awful fear and the dread of disastrous consequences in the world to

come. That this position is not a mere assumption may be easily proven.

The universal tendency of men in all ages to offer sacrifices is a tacit admission on man's part that he is not on easy terms with God. The sacrifice is an acknowledgment of human guilt, an expression of human fear, and an effort to propitiate deity; so that the penalty of divine wrath may be escaped, and God's attitude be changed from hostility to friendship. Every smoking altar and bleeding sacrifice and swinging censer is a declaration of the need of atonement.

The testimony of conscience is to the same effect. Conscience fails to discover itself until it is violated. It is the stormy protest of a man's own soul against his sin. It is the majestic voice of the inner Sinai speaking in commandment tones "Thou shalt not." The accusing conscience is an argument for the necessity of an atonement.

Human laws with their prisons and penalties are prima facie evidence that man falls short of God's perfect will and needs a mediator. Our statutes are marks we set for ourselves. They are barriers which we build around frail and tempted life to protect against sin. They are mute admissions that man falls short of the human standard of right, and so much farther short of the divine standard.

The dissatisfaction which creeps into the heart, even amid greatest prosperity and seem-

ingly full success is an indication that the life is out of harmony with God. Fearful forebodings of the future annoy. Dread spectral figures flit across the pathway. The future is an impenetrable shadow. Its tenant is a fear. We call the fear God.

All this is evidence that we are not what we ought to be. Our neighbours condemn us, our laws condemn us, our own hearts condemn us. How can man be justified in the eyes of the sinless and sin-hating God? The man who claims to be as good as he ought to be is either a hypocrite or a fool. Sins rise like a thick mist and the face of God is veiled. When misfortune comes, he fears it is a blow from the veiled enemy. All this and more is sufficient proof of the imperative necessity of an atonement.

Christ effects the atonement. His mission is to establish man and God on friendly terms, until man shall seek instead of shun, hope instead of fear, trust instead of doubt, love instead of hate. Atonement is reconciliation. It may be pronounced at-one-ment.

It is the fundamental doctrine or fact of Christianity. It is the sheet anchor of faith. Let one be sound on the atonement and he will swing safe elsewhere. Let him be loose here and directly he will be altogether adrift. The melancholy spectacle has been witnessed in recent years of the ministerial decline of a man whose career had blazoned the church with well-nigh zenith use-

fulness. In every considerable city of the land he had addressed vast audiences and helped thousands of Christians into a fuller life. But he never preached the atonement. He failed, apparently, to give it room in his own experience. His ministry has gone into eclipse, and his power to help his fellow-men in the ascent to God has waned.

One may believe what he pleases about the second coming of Christ, he may be post-millennialist or pre-millennialist; he may believe as he will about the order of the divine decrees, he may be super-lapsarian or sub-lapsarian or just ordinary-every-day-sort-of lapsarian; he may have his doubts about providence and inspiration, sanctification and faith-cure; but if he is sound and evangelical in his view of the atonement, he will emerge at the summit. If he has experienced the atonement he is already on the altar stairs.

Nevertheless there are many who turn from the atonement with aversion. It offends the esthetic. It is regarded as the synonym of a bloody and brutal creed. Its righteousness is pronounced fictitious. It is supposed to brand God with partiality. It is pronounced a mercenary transaction by which, in a mechanical way and through the pious juggling of an arbitrary substitution, the sinner is invested with a merit not his own.

The atonement has suffered at the hands of the dogmatist. It has been lifted out of the Bible,

its heart beat has been stilled, it has been reduced to a fleshless, pulseless skeleton, and the meatless bone of a juiceless dogma has been offered to the soul to feed upon. Theology is not always the friend of religion. Flowers are not botany, and theology is not religion.

The atonement has suffered in the esteem of many devout people because it has been caricatured. At least three of these caricatures call for mention.

The first makes the atonement a method of reconciling God to man. The passion of Christ is represented as the price paid to secure to man the favour of God. Calvary is a financial transaction by which God the Son induces God the Father to be merciful to man the sinner.

This is not the atonement. It is the travesty of it. It slanders God. He has never been estranged from man. God does not change. To be sure he cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. He is a just God and has an eternal anger for sin. It is only through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ that God can be "just and the justifier of the unjust." But God has never stopped loving man. The love he had, he has. The parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son are Christ's beautiful way of saying that God cares for the wayward. It is not that God needs to be reconciled to man but man to God.

A second caricature limits the atonement to a

comparatively small and highly favoured class, arbitrarily selected, chosen from all eternity, and whose number is so definitely fixed that it can neither be increased nor diminished.

Something is said about a limited and an unlimited atonement. If one adheres to a limited atonement, orthodoxy pronounces him sound. If one advocates an unlimited atonement, orthodoxy regards him as dangerous.

Undoubtedly the blessings of Christ's atoning work are limited to those who receive them. He cannot save a sinner who refuses to be saved. The convict may be offered a pardon, and the prison bolts and bars may all be drawn, but he must claim his freedom and walk out into the open, if his pardon is to bring him liberty. It is the same with the pardon Christ offers. While sufficient for all, it is efficient only for those who claim it. To say that this limits the atonement is to go far afield for a phrase with which to bolster a dogma.

The air is free to all, but if it is to purify one's blood, it must be breathed in. Shall we therefore say the air is limited? The sun shines for all, but if it is to bless you, you must stand in its glory and be baptised with its light and life. Shall we for that reason say the sun is limited? Christ died for all. If he is to save he must be appropriated. That does not negative the "whosoever will," nor brand the Gospel call with insincerity.

Again the atonement has been limited to a single incident in Christ's career,—to the moment of his death on the cross. Little has been made of his life and teachings. His vicarious merit has been confined to his death. Unquestionably, the atonement was climaxed on the cross. The sublimest and supremest act in the vicarious sacrifice was when he said " Father into thy hand I commend my spirit," and gave up the ghost. But that was not all. He lived an atoning life as well as died an atoning death. His death was so great because his life had been so good.

Calvary was only one note in the threnody of divine suffering and humiliation. It was but a single step in the long journey of the via dolorosa.

Jesus was reconciling to God when the angels sang " Peace on earth " over Bethlehem's starlit plains. His miracles, his sermons, his sympathy for distress, his sadness over human woe, his solace of human sorrow were all a part of the at-one-ment. When he wept over Jerusalem, when he pardoned the thief on the cross, when he prayed " Father forgive them," he was trying to show that God is a friend. Not only when on Calvary he lifted nail-pierced hands to tear aside the veil which fear had woven across the face of God, but everywhere and always Christ's message to man is " God is love."

The atonement is not the lonely incident of a solitary and isolated moment, but the work of a

life-time and the lesson of an ever widening knowledge and ever clearer view of God.

It is Jesus showing God's face. Some of the steps in the disclosure are named. They are the acts of the atoning Christ in time. They are the successive stages by which the sinner becomes reconciled to God. In their totality they may be called "the atonement."

Christ is justification.* The first thing he does for the sinner is to take him out of the prisoner's dock and exchange his prison stripes for citizen's garb. The bars are taken from the windows and the bolts from the doors. The indictment is dismissed. God is no longer a frowning judge with a commandment face. He can be just and the justifier of the unjust.

Then Christ becomes propitiation.† Propitiation is something more than justification. It is pardon. It is the sense of forgiveness. It is the discovery that in the place of old hostility, there has come into God's heart a feeling of concern for man's welfare.

The story is told of a British soldier who had broken every rule of the army and on whom every form of punishment had been inflicted without avail. He sinned again. His commanding officer was in despair as to what should be done. A fellow officer said "Suppose you try forgiveness." The guilty soldier was summoned. On being asked what he had to say in palliation of his

* Rom. 5:1; 8:1. † Eph. 1:7

offence, he hung his head and replied: "Nothing, except I'm very sorry." "Well," said the officer, "We have decided to forgive you." The culprit looked dazed, burst into tears, saluted, and went out to become one of the best soldiers in the army.

That is the vision which the propitiating Christ gives of God. It is the God who corrects with forgiveness. When one sees that face, fear goes, love comes, and there is born the resolve that issues in a new life.

Then Christ becomes mediator.* Son of Man and Son of God, he is the common meeting ground for man and God. He is the medium through which man passes to God and God passes to man. He is the bridge on which God and man meet and greet in the embrace of a complete reconciliation.

He is this because he is love. Love is the only medium in which God and the sinner can unite. Power is not; what community is there between omnipotence and human frailty? Knowledge is not; what community is there between omniscience and human ignorance? Holiness is not; what community is there between divine perfection and human guilt? Love is the only bridge on which man and his maker can meet. Because Christ is love he is the bridge.

He shows man how to love God and shows man how God loves. The Saviour's sufferings

*Jno. 14:6.

and death are also a manifestation of the Father's love. While the supreme tragedy was enacting on Calvary, God was not listless and indifferent. Every throb of agony which trembled through the crucified Christ, smote upon the heart of God the Father. Calvary's suffering reproduced itself and God was crucified with Christ.

Among those who suffered in the fearful flood which well nigh destroyed Galveston was a young mother, known to the writer, whose baby was swept from her arms in the awful storm. For three long days and nights she sought amid the debris for the dead body of her child, wading for hours in water to her waist, enduring hunger and thirst and great weariness in the hope, which was not realized, of once more holding in her arms, if no more than the lifeless body of her baby. That is the tragedy and glory of parental love. That is the vision Christ gives us of God. When we see it, trust takes the place of doubt and hope of fear.

But we are not left standing on the bridge, the atoning Christ becomes our elder brother.* We are adopted into God's family. The sinner is marked with sonship. God's dwelling becomes his home. He is joint heir with Christ. Then, as the supreme achievement of the atonement in time, Christ becomes our life and God our inspiration. The ideal of Jesus was his Father in heaven. He brings his disciple under the spell

*Heb. 2: 11.

of the same sovereign influence, until the vision of God's face becomes the inspiration of the soul. The joy of a thing is that it pleases God; and the hurt is that it sorrows him.

Thus, one by one, the shadows lift, and bit by bit, the veil is torn away, until we see God as he is, and call him "Our Father," exclaiming "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now received the atonement." *

This is the divine method for breaking the fatal spell of sin.

The tragedy of the fall is repaired by the tragedy of reconciliation. Sin's estrangement is overcome in love's at-one-ment.

We may not discover at the start all that the atoning Christ secures and reveals. But if Christ be ours he is ours for all that he is and all that he can do. A friend may give me a casket with many compartments, in each of which a treasure reposes, and say, "You may open one compartment each successive year." I do not know all that is in the casket, but it is all mine, and some day I shall know. Is it not thus with the reconciling Christ? We do not see at once all that he reveals and secures, but it is all ours if Christ be ours. Some day we shall know our boundless treasure; and discover that the love of God, Christ shows us here, is to the love of God in its fullness as a day dream to a millennium.

The atoning Christ breaks the fatal spell of sin.

* Rom. 5: 11.

Human enough to show us to God, and holy enough to show God to us; through whom all our weakness trembles up to God, and all God's glory shimmers down on us; the atoning Christ bids the reconciled soul ascend to those heights he seeks who sings: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." *

* Ps. 17: 15.

XIII

IS GOD ANCIENT HISTORY?

"Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand
sure."

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

THE third fact for the soul to realise is the present and permanent reality of God.

What God is, he was; what God was, he is; what God is and was, he will always be.

Jesus Christ stands for the manifestation of God among men. He who reflects, will have suggested to him certain primary and fundamental facts about God which need to be carried in mind in this discussion.

One of them is that God does not reason. He is above the necessity of it. He cannot reason. Reason is the slow process by which finite thought feels its way from premise to conclusion. It is crossing the river of mystery on stones whose faces lift just above the surface. God does not need to do this for he knows all things. All past, present, and future lies at once in the zone of God's consciousness. Therefore

the process of reasoning becomes unnecessary and impossible.

God does not contradict himself. He is not one thing for one race and the opposite for another. There are no new facts for him. He does not discredit himself in one age by what he says or does in another.

God does not change. He is not a development. His plans unfold, his creatures develop, but he is an eternal now. Man's vision of God may change, but it is because man himself is changing. The telescope enables the eye to cut into the far off shadows which mantle Jupiter and to discover its moons, but this larger vision changes in nothing the planet and its satellites. The soul's expanding spiritual experience gives it telescopic power in its vision of God, but changes in nothing God's being. "I am that I am," flamed in the bramble shekinah on Sinai. "I am the Lord, I change not," is the echo of the last prophet voice of the old dispensation.

God does not reason, he does not contradict himself, he does not change. Throw all of that, first into yesterday, and then into to-day, and then into to-morrow, and one has three visions of God —past, present and future. What was God yesterday? What is God now? What will God be hereafter?

Yesterday

Yesterday God was what he is. Is God ancient history? Yes, most emphatically. He is not a

novelty. He is no new discovery of the twentieth century. He is not a deity that has lain dormant for many millenniums, leaving the universe to manage itself as best it could, but who at last has awakened to find work to do. He is not a God who in these latter times has gotten a new code of morals, a fresh sense of duty, a more enlightened method of salvation. It would scarcely be worth while saying this but for the effort of some to discredit it. There is a fresh ministry that turns up its nose at the old faiths. There are preachers who can discourse eloquently on any subject save the old Gospel. Dates and names the church was wont to reverence are ridiculed. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is characterised as crude, and his message as barbaric. Abraham, in his life of faith, thought he was serving God, but in reality he was only showing his lack of sense. The Israelites thought God was leading them to Canaan but the crossing of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire and cloud, and all the other theophanies existed only in their imagination. God was not there.

Back yonder in yesterday, we are told, God was a dwarf and man was a monkey. Recently, however, things have greatly improved. God has been revised and man has been evolved. The God of the Bible was very inadequate and inconsequential, compared to the highly developed and scientific deity of current dates.

Such is the gospel a small but arrogant and

pretentious school of iconoclastic religionists preach to-day. They proceed on the supposition that the present becomes great as the past is made insignificant. The religious experiences of former epochs are branded as delusions. The Bible is yesterday's book and hence should be patronised rather than obeyed. The creeds of yesterday are ridiculed. Into the temple of most cherished religious ideals the modern iconoclast rushes like a bull into a china shop. When he has finished there is a lot of broken china, but nothing to take its place.

Was yesterday's God so bad? Was yesterday's work so faulty? Was yesterday's worship so credulous? What God is, he was. The same God that is at work in the world to-day was the God of Abraham and David, of the prophets and apostles, and of all that host who in yesterday heard and heeded the divine oracles.

It is, of course, true that the race as a whole profits by the religious experiences of past generations. Therefore its vision cuts deeper into the shadows which drape God. But it is not true that the religious development of the individual begins at a higher point. The theory that man was ever a mere animal is not proven. The science of evolution belongs to the inexact sciences.

Human nature is what it was. It is subject to the same temptations, capable of the same plunges of moral degradation, susceptible of the same re-

demptive motives. In the saving of a human life, God faces precisely the same problem, speaks precisely the same message and offers the same Saviour. He has no new way of redemption. And there is no evidence that men can be saved in any other than the old way. Culture clubs and settlement work are valuable adjuncts, but do not displace the cross. Indeed they are valuable only as they express the cross.

There is no evidence that the present day man is achieving any closer walk with God, any finer character or deeper spiritual experience than did his fathers. Why, then, belittle the past? He who does it beggars the present. The man who has only a sneer for yesterday is likely to have only an interrogation point for to-day. True greatness always recognizes itself, and it is the sign of a baby mind to deride past achievements. His is the true spirit who finds in yesterday inspiration and incentive for to-day.

"Life is too short to waste
In critic peep or cynic bark,
Quarrel or reprimand,
'Twill soon be dark;
Up! Mind thine own aim, and
God speed the mark!" *

Shall we pull down St. Peter's because it was not built in the latest century? Shall we call Raphael's masterpieces crude, and Correggio's

* Emerson.

frescoes immature, because they are not more modern? Shall Homer and Dante be relegated to the attic because they are not up to date? Sillier by far is the empty-headed and shallow-hearted loquacity that makes fun of the old masterpieces of religion.

Toward yesterday there is but one attitude for a noble mind—reverence.

To-day.

To-day, God is what he was. God is not merely ancient history. He is not a relic, a memory, an old song. God is in the world right now.

This would hardly be worth the saying but for the tendency to doubt it. There are some living at the far swing of the pendulum from the belittlers of the past. They are thinking and toiling as though God were confined to yesterday. He was down in the world in the days of the patriarchs, but he is not here now. He talked with men in prophetic times, but that kind of conversation has ceased forever. There were revelations and revivals formerly, but ours is a sterile, godless age. All greatness is behind us.

These are the people who turn the pages of musty volumes for all their thoughts of God. They reach the mercy seat by way of the Reformation or the Council of Trent. They imagine that the best thing possible for to-day is to duplicate yesterday. Such are mummified con-

servatives, visionless traditionists, vainly trying to move forward by walking backward. They are in the clutch of a dead hand, and are overcome with dismay by every new idea. Is it such a godless world now?

Is it a crime to think about God for oneself? Is a fresh vision of the Saviour heresy? What God was, he is. God has not contracted his residence. He has not diminished his activities. He has not withdrawn himself from man. He is guiding as surely now as in the days of the pillared presence. He is working now as successfully as in the time of oracle and miracle. He is as close to the modern man as he ever was to Moses and Paul. He has as much for this age as he ever had for any age.

God is what he was. This does not mean that the present, to succeed, must duplicate the past. Reverence is not necessarily imitation. Because God does not change, it does not follow that the world must not change. The world must be becoming more and more what God wants it to be. That implies constant change. "First the blade, then the ear; after that the full corn in the ear." That is the divine plan for the growth of a soul. It is also the divine plan for the growth of the world. There must be constant development and not ceaseless reduplication.

Each age has its definite contribution to make to the world's religious life. One age came close to God and its religious experience is em-

bodied in the sacred scriptures. Another age, receiving the legacy of scripture, came close to God, and its religious experience is embodied in the creeds of Christendom.

The present age is neither a Bible-making nor a creed-making age. Both of these belong to a past development. But we have a definite work to do. What is it? The religious life of to-day is developing in a two-fold direction.

The first has to do with the source of authority in religion. What is authority in religion? Is it reason, the scriptures, the church, or conscience? That goes back of creeds, back of Bible making. It is the mightiest question Christian thought has yet grappled. It is being fought out by giants in the hottest controversy the church has known.

The second has to do with philanthropy. It is not doctrinal but practical. It is the effort to conform social conditions to the teachings of Jesus. The emphasis was never so strong on deeds. We are trying to think God into capital and labour. God is ringing in old truths like the beatitudes and the golden rule upon real life. This is the work he is doing before our very eyes. Because he is not writing Bibles now, and working miracles now, we need not conclude that the old Bible is a human book and the miracles fictions. Because the stalk grows the ear after it does the blade, the ear must not conclude that the stalk is a fiction. What God does

for one age, he does for all ages. The growth of the stalk yesterday is a contribution to its development to-day and to-morrow.

Instead of saying God never worked a miracle because he is not now working miracles, and that all the past is a lie which is not duplicated by the present, it were better to come close to God and embody the religious experiences of our age in the development that is imminent.

Above all the fact should be recognised that God is on the ground. Divinity is still in the calendar. This is no dead age. It is man's sublimest epoch. Stupid dreamer is he who sighs for a residence in the middle ages. Poor saint is he whose best worship is given to relics. Up from among the graves, and attention, for God is marching on.

All greatness is not sepulchred. All divinity is not in the catechism or the prayer book. The preacher is not the only apostle of God. All life is sacred, and wherever one stands in earnest toil, he may have the vision of God upon his life, and catch into his own innermost soul the living message of the inaudible voice.

The soul that would ascend must have the enthusiasm of life and a decent treatment of to-day. It must quit digging in ashes of the past. It must stop shooting at stars of to-morrow and grapple the chances of to-day. He is most God's prophet now who

"Sees, in some dead leaf, dried and curled,
The deeper meaning of the world;
Hears through the roar of mortal things
The God's immortal whisperings;
Sees the world wonder rise and fall,
And knows that Beauty made it all." *

Toward to-day there is but one attitude for a life—diligence!

To-morrow.

To-morrow God will be what he is and was. He is more than all history, both ancient and modern. He holds the keys of all unknown. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." †

Some queer views of the hereafter are cherished. Death is regarded as a sort of supernatural presto-change, by which, without either rhyme or reason, what was very bad becomes very good, what was very shameless becomes very reputable, what was very worthless becomes very valuable.

Others think of the hereafter as a blissful collapse of all activity, an instantaneous introduction into an Eden of celestial idleness.

Both views of the forever life are false.

God will be the same that he is. What is infamous here will be infamous hereafter. That

* Markham. † Heb. 13:8

which is punished here will continue to be punished. God does not change morals when he changes worlds. Indolence will be as much a disgrace in heaven as on earth. One will need more than his Sunday clothes when he gets to paradise. He will find employment.

Some one asked Paderewski how long he would continue to play. He replied. "Always, I suppose. Indeed my life would be quite void without music. I cannot imagine what I would do if I were compelled to deny myself its comforts." "Don't most people drop it when they grow old?" "Yes, amateurs, but artists cling to it." "Does not genius grow old and lose its youth?" Paderewski smiled as he said: "Genius is one of the few things that are supposed to improve with age."

Christ said: "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." Salvation is not a dead wall. Heaven is not a pent-up Utica. Paradise is not a summer dream. If God is the same to-morrow that he is to-day, then to-morrow will not be to-day's duplicate, but its better.

That is what God stands for. The kingdom is always coming, never come. Human life with God as its inspiration is an eternal expansion.

What God is and was he will be. One may not know all it means, but it certainly means the world is not adrift. It is making for a destina-

tion. It has terminal facilities. Life is not the victim of fate nor the play of chance. It means that every great truth and good cause now struggling will fight its way through to victory. "Good will be the final goal of ill." The time will come when the beatitudes will cease to be mottoes and become laws; when, in practice as well as theory, merit will outrank might, and giving be more blessed than getting.

It means the impossibility of defeat or failure for the life that works with God. As the old Roman gladiators rushed into the arena for mortal combat with wild beasts, facing the throne-place, they shouted: "Oh, Emperor, those that are about to live, salute thee!"

It is some such victorious assurance that swells in a redeemed soul as it confronts eternity and knows the changeless God will be there. Toward to-morrow there is but one attitude for a Christian—confidence.

The God of the ages is a present reality. Human struggle is puny without his help; and beggared is the soul. It becomes a discord in God's great orchestra; a sullen silence in God's breathing world of worship; without reverence for the past, without diligence for the present, without confidence for the future.

What God is he was; what he was, he is; what he was and is, he will be forever. The soul that struggles to climb through clouds to sunny

heights may have this God for a friend. Time-worn, chased, fretted, and spent, strength is renewed in him; for into the ever-changing life come the freshness, beauty and power of one who, " from the womb of the morning, has the dew of his youth."

XIV

THE SILENCE OF GOD

"Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive:
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?"

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

THE soul which is to become more than it is must listen when God speaks and trust where God is silent. That is a profound proverb which says: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." *

God's glory is concealment, man's glory is discovery. It is to God's credit that he does not tell all he knows; it is to man's credit that he investigates, explores and ascertains what he did not know. Silence is a mark of the divine; search is a mark of the human.

God has told some things. He has broken the

* Prov. 25:2.

silence between the natural and the supernatural, between the visible and the invisible, between the known and the unknown, between the world of sense and the world of spirit. God has spoken, not in some vague and inarticulate way, through his works and providence, but in the very words of human speech. The product is the Bible. There is a book which contains the thoughts of God. In it he tells us some things he desires us to know. It is the revelation of his plan for a human life. It touches on the momentous problems of the soul and the hereafter. It is no common book. It is the compend of what God has deemed it best to say. The soul that would ascend must be guided by the light of revealed truth.

If God cares for us, it must be taken for granted that he would say something. If he is, as he claims, our Father, it is but natural that he should talk to us and tell us his hopes and fears, his aspirations and desires for his children. If one never talks with his children they may well conclude either that he is angry or that he is indifferent. It would be a strange God who would leave the soul groping in the darkness, when he could cheer with a word and make plain and luminous the way. It is wonderful that God has made a revelation, but it would be more wonderful if he had not.

What God has said has been the subject of incessant attack. The attack is at present more

formidable and bitter than ever. Criticism scrutinises and challenges every syllable in the two Testaments. Scholars, who claim to be the friends of the Bible, have assailed its authority, and have boasted over the discovery of its mistakes. What mistakes have they found? They have discovered that the two accounts of Paul's conversion do not harmonise. One says that those who stood by saw the light but did not hear the voice; the other, that they heard the voice but did not see the light—a flat contradiction? The vulgar crowd of religious indifferents point with delight to this and similar triumphs of destructive criticism and say, "The Bible is full of mistakes. It is untrustworthy. God has made no revelation."

Christianity stands or falls with the authority of Scripture. Whoever impairs the faith of mankind in the word of God is an enemy of religion, however much he may claim to be its friend. He should be assigned to the ranks of infidelity, and be treated as a foe. If the Bible is false, Christianity is false. If the Bible is a fallible, human book, the gospel is a fallible, human religion. Let us understand the magnitude of the issue. In modern discussions of the Bible more is at stake than a theory of inspiration. Calvary is at stake. Religion may be approved by reason and endorsed by the church, but this is not enough. God's voice alone commands assent. The Bible is the voice of God—nothing less. There is

much to prove it. The structure of the book, its contents, the history of its preservation, the experience of its truths all attest its divine origin; but there is another and an unusual proof that the Bible is the voice of God. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." The Bible is a divine book not only because of what it contains, but also because of what it does not contain. The silence of God is an unanswerable proof of the divine authorship of the Bible. The soul that would rise must not only be guided by the light of revealed truth, but must move none the less confident of God's presence in the stretches of silence.

God has not told all he knows. He has told some things, but he has not told everything. What he has told is worth more than all the rest of human knowledge. Paul began by asking "Who art thou, Lord?" Ere long he was saying, "I know whom I have believed." Before he quit work, he filled more than a dozen little books with his knowledge of God. God may be known. Absolute agnosticism is absurd. But while God has told enough to make himself known, he has not told all he knows. How could he? Human language could not express it. Human language is finite, and God is infinite. It were as easy to dip up the Atlantic in a tin cup or to cram the universe into a bushel measure as to make man's finite speech hold God's infinite thought. There are thoughts in

God's mind we do not know, can never know. Absolute agnosticism is silly and preposterous, but partial agnosticism is reverent and inevitable. God does not care to perplex. He means us to find out some things by digging for them, others by experiencing them. "It is the honour of kings to search out a matter." Reverent research discovers divine secrets, and the book of revelation is constantly growing. God is as eloquent in what he has not told as in what he has revealed. He tells as much when he is silent as when he speaks. The dumbness of Scripture is more eloquent than all tongued revelations. The silence of God is as significant as any truth that ever made a noise in the world.

I believe that God wrote the Bible, because of what it does not contain. If man had written it, he would have put in much that is left out. If man had written the Bible, he would have begun by trying to prove that there is a God. He would have tried to answer that question the human mind is ever asking,—"How did God get his start?" "How can he be without a beginning?" The Bible offers no explanation. The Almighty puts an end to speculation by saying, "I am that I am." Jehovah steps out upon the platform of the universe and begins to speak without an introduction. At the sound of his voice the void thrills and throbs and peoples with countless worlds. "Let there be light, and there was light." That is written as a God would write.

After that, how puerile to try to explain "how God got his start." Take the theme of creation. If a man had directed the narration of creation he would have entered into details. The multiplicity of minutiae would have overwhelmed him. The history of creation is a stupendous undertaking. A mere man would have filled an encyclopedia. The Bible requires a single chapter. It is silent as to details. Its author is God. He throws the picture on the canvas in massive outline, and yet the scene is complete. The Bible account of creation has been called by some a "poetic illustration;" by others, "a scientific diagram." It is both and neither. It has the exactness of a diagram without its restrictions, and the suggestiveness of an illustration without its vagueness.

Take again the problems of the origin of evil and the mysteries of providence. Why was sin permitted to enter the world? Why do the good suffer and the wicked prosper? Man would certainly have ventured an opinion on this subject. The Bible does not. It tells the story of how sin entered the human heart, and in doing so enables each one to see the tragedy of a lost Eden reenacted in his own experience; but it is silent as to the rest. In the epic of Job, it not only refuses to explain the mysteries of providence, but shows the absurdity of human speculations on this subject.

Or take again some of the great theological

facts of revelation, the trinity, the incarnation, the new birth. About these we are ever asking, with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" It is like a man to say "I will tell you how these things be;" but it is like a God to say, "You cannot know." These great facts are given not to be understood but experienced.

Christ's childhood is a fascinating theme. If the Bible were a book of human origin it would spend much time on the childhood of Jesus. The apocryphal gospels do; but the Bible breaks the silence only twice and then briefly. God rolls up the curtain on the Christ-life only where the light breaks on the tragedy of sin. If man were the sole author of the Scriptures, he would have said much about the future life. He would have answered, or tried to answer, many questions about heaven and the resurrection. He would have discussed at length the end of the world. The Bible is strangely and significantly silent here. "I go to prepare a place for you." That is as clear as the revelation of heaven ever gets. The Bible indulges in no small talk about the details of the resurrection. It sublimely affirms, "This mortal shall put on immortality." The Bible reads as if God were its author. Its silence where man would have prattled proclaims its divine origin. God's silence is one of the conditions of man's growth. It is an incitement to progress. Sir Wm. Hamilton declared that were he given the choice between "Truth and the pursuit of truth,"

he would reverently and firmly reject truth and choose its pursuit. God is after building character rather than satisfying curiosity. He would rather we should grow than know.

His silence is also essential to worship. Man reverences the unknown. If he knew all that God knows, he would conclude that he is as God is. God is silent, to keep man on his knees.

But God is silent on much in order that what he does say may be clothed with divine authority. There is a criticism which cannot see a tree for its leaves, a mountain for the pebbles in the walk, the stars for the lightning bugs in the air. There is a criticism which fires catapults at sparrows, hunts grasshoppers with Gatling guns and goes afield with a harvester and reaper to gather a handful of daisies. There is a scholarship which cannot see the Bible for the mistakes of its translators. It halts before a discrepancy in the narrative of Paul's conversion and says, "Look at that; the Bible is a human, fallible book." It were wiser to pass to the great issues of the book; to listen to its sublime message of sin and redemption; to read what it says, and to ponder what it does not say.

There is a glory about the book which is not earth-born, a majesty not terrestrial, an authority eternal. It is a voice from the central heavens, a message from the omnipotent throne. Man may criticise the book, but it survives with page undimmed and glory untarnished. Its very

silence is eloquent. Its pauses are prophets. Its punctuation points are lyric notes in celestial melodies. It is supernatural on its vocal mountain tops. It is not less supernatural in the deep unbroken stillness of its shadowed glades of silence.

It reveals the way of life. It leads up to God and all that is good. To know it is the height of human knowledge; to teach it the summit of human service; to circulate it the work of true philanthropy. It is a safe book to live by, a sweet book to die by, a sufficient book for this world where we know in part and prophesy in part, and a primer for that vaster and eternal world, where we shall "know even as also we are known."

XV

THE CENTURIES AGAINST THE HOURS

"Perfect I call thy plan!
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what
thou shalt do!"

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

MR. EMERSON has somewhere said that the supreme lesson of life is learning what the centuries say against the hours. It is a striking way of stating the need of patience in the soul's struggle toward perfection.

Man is all for immediate results. He listens for what the hours have to say, and concludes that as things are now, so they will be forever. He is hot and impatient and finds it hard to wait, especially when waiting strains faith. He is disposed to reason, "If right is ever to succeed, why not now? If virtue is ever to be rewarded, why not at once?"

His reasoning is explained by his limitations. Finite, he sees but a section. Shut up to a seventy years' residence in time, he is doomed to be a provincial. His knowledge is superficial, and his

views are narrow. He is short sighted and disposed to conclude that the biggest is the nearest.

The effect is disastrous in many ways. It produces a distortion of vision. A small section is mistaken for the whole. Current events are magnified into either better or worse than they are.

Workers grow discouraged if success is not immediate. If the reformation cannot be effected in a fortnight, if the devil cannot be whipped in the first round, if the kingdom cannot be established in a jiffy, why struggle on? We see one failure and suffer total collapse. We listen to the drivel of the hours and dwindle to pigmies. We witness one defeat of morality and tremble for God. We behold one dying church and doubt Calvary.

God is all for ultimate and enduring results. He is building for the ages. His message is voiced by the deep toned centuries. He sees the end from the beginning. With him a thousand years and a nightwatch have the same measurements. The thing which is to be is not less certain than that which has already transpired. When he sees a grain of wheat die, he thinks of a harvest field and is not alarmed. When the lightning leaps and the thunder roars, he thinks of cleaner air for all creature life, and lets the storm play on. He rates the present by its value to the future. He relates seconds to eternities.

This fact is conspicuous in all God's works.

Creation is not the story of an hour but of drawn out Geologic ages. It has come to pass through lengthy periods of development. Salvation both in its provision and application is a product of the God of patience. Providence moves in century cycles and fills the ages with its plan. God has more than a day at his disposal.

His promise to his chosen people was "I will make thee an eternal excellency." * He did not seek their temporary welfare, nor pledge them a momentary victory. Judged by the hour-standard, Israel was a failure. At many a stage of the nation's development they might have asked the child's question, who was told to pray "Our Father" to cure a mashed and aching thumb. The little fellow repeated his paternoster, then surveyed the still painful and unhealed member, and judiciously observed: "Lord, is this the best you can do?"

A nation of slaves, then nomads for forty years in the wilderness, then obliged to fight desperately for every foot of the land of promise, plagued by hostile peoples on every side, cursed by internal dissensions, led into exile, their cities sacked, their temples destroyed, their lands devastated, Israel might well ask the God of the Covenant: "Is this the best thou canst do, O Lord of hosts?" Nevertheless, through it all God was making them an eternal excellency. The sinews of a mighty people were forming to struggle and

* Isa. 60: 15.

use. There was developing a religious consciousness to guide the worship of the race; and in the fulness of time appeared a Saviour to reveal, inspire, and redeem. In the light of the centuries Israel is a permanent success.

The divine method of dealing with the individual life is similar. One frets over seeming failures. We are ever dinging at Job's problem of suffering, and challenging the power that permits disaster to overtake us. We put our hardships in the setting of a single day and ask God if it is the best he can do. He places it in the setting of a century and replies: "I will make thee an eternal excellency."

He is after soul growth. The sinews of an enduring character are forming to strength and use. The fact of a glorious immortality is coming to pass in the inner life. Nothing is accidental, nothing fails of its mark. At last when the veil is lifted, and the long and devious way lies open in a single view, doubts will pass,

> "And we shall know how all God's ways were right,
> And how what seemed reproof, was love most true."

The hour which segregates itself becomes a false prophet. The wise man is a student of history. The key to human progress is patience. One man listens to the monotone of the hour, and says "Confusion, failure, defeat, disaster." Another catches the measure of the full-voiced century, and strikes notes of hope and utters mes-

sages of cheer. Victory is a little nearer than it was, and the glorious summit-heights are less far away.

Man is all for immediate results, but God is all for ultimate and enduring results. The soul that would ascend must listen to what the centuries have to say against the hours. Hope is the child of memory. He who would not despair must not forget.

"God of our Fathers—known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget." *

The verdict of the hours has often been reversed by that of the centuries.

This is the testimony of Calvary. When Christ was crucified all seemed lost. After a meteoric career, he was captured by his enemies, nailed to the cross, and sealed in the tomb. The hour said "All is over, Jesus has lived and suffered in vain. Hate has defeated love, and error truth."

From the cross Christ passed to the throne. His death was his supremest triumph, and his dying cry the shout of a world conqueror.

The same testimony is uttered by every martyr and in every chapter of martyr history. The hour declared the Protestant Reformation a fail-

* Kipling.

ure. It seemed a hopeless struggle where one weak man was pitted against a mighty hierarchy, but the centuries show that God was standing in the shadows "keeping watch upon his own."

It is the same lesson that speaks in the marvellous story of modern missions. The hour when Wm. Carey sailed for India said "A fanatic has started on a fool's errand." The 19th century, the greatest missionary century in the history of the church, says, "It was the van-guard, marching to a world conquest." It is the lesson of secular no less than of sacred history. In the struggle for American Independence, when Washington's ragged, hungry army bivouacked in the bitter cold at Valley Forge, the hour said, "It is a bootless struggle." But the century in which America has grown to her peerless greatness declares that fateful winter to have been "the fair beginning of a time."

It is the same story which comes across the barren, waste fields of Southern Va., when Lee's surrender sent the Confederacy into history as a "lost cause." Less than half a century has passed, but it is enough to prove the defeat a victory in disguise. God was saying to a nation once more, "I will make thee an eternal excellency." The abolition of slavery has turned out to be not so much the emancipation of the blacks as of the whites.

Thus the lesson makes itself manifold and touches all life. The things which seemed

hardest and worst at the time, turn out the best. When all seems lost, the victory is nearest won.

The true prophet is he whose torch lights the ages. Immediate results are nothing, ultimate results are everything.

What are the centuries saying?

That the world is moving according to a definite and divine plan. There is room for neither chance nor fate. Sovereign wisdom is on the throne and nothing is accidental. The hours may prattle of "accidents," but the word is not found in the lexicon of the centuries. The centuries are calvinistic.

If all things are in the safe control of an all-wise providence the soul which strives after the best need have no fear.

In "Through Nature to God," Mr. John Fiske says: "If we really understood the universe of which humanity is a part, we should find scientific justification for that supreme and victorious faith which cries, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.' The man who has acquired such faith as this is the true freeman of the universe, clad in stoutest coat of mail against disaster and sophistry—the man whom nothing can enslave, and whose guerdon is the serene happiness that can never be taken away."

The centuries are saying that the world is growing better. The hours may be pessimistic, but the centuries are not. The world is fuller of

light. There is more knowledge, more practical human goodness. It is a kinder world to live in than ever before. Poverty abounds, but never was so much doing to alleviate poverty. Disease abides and sorrow lasts, but never was medical skill so panoplied in the grapple with disease and never had sorrow such sweet consolations.

"Thus while the Earth spirit goes on," says the writer just quoted, "unhasting yet unresting, weaving in the loom of Time the visible garment of God, we begin to see that even what look like failures and blemishes, have been, from the outset involved in the accomplishment of the all-wise and all-holy purpose, the perfecting of the spiritual man in the likeness of his Heavenly Father."

The centuries are on the side of the ten commandments, and the beatitudes. They side with the cross of Christ and the throne of God. The hours may depress, but the centuries are full of cheer. The struggles of faith will end in endless victory. The long night will slip into dawn. The centuries will ring eternity in upon time, and announce "immortality." The long pilgrimage will end, the dire siege will lift, and trial be over.

The hours may say "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," but the centuries proclaim "This mortal shall put on immortality." Tired,

foot-sore, wayworn and faint, the summit of achievement shall be reached at last, and faith's journey end in "welcome to the weary."

Then will come the ecstacy of full discovery and perfect explanation. The purpose of every providence will show clear on those heights above the stars, and the meaning of every trial be found kindly. Man will discover that all along God was striving to make him an "eternal excellency," and he will not mind the scars.

The first Victoria cross to be bestowed for valor in the British-Boer war, was given to a soldier named Towse. He had watched beside the dead body of his commanding officer all night on the field of battle, and fought away the prowling Boers. A gun shot had destroyed the sight of both eyes, and the blind soldier was led by his wife into the presence of the Queen and assembled court to receive the proudest token of British heroism and valour. The Queen's hand trembled as she pinned the cross to the soldier's breast, and her voice choked with emotion as she thanked him for his gallantry and devotion to duty. What was the soldier's blinding wound then? His sovereign never seemed more beautiful than when seen with sightless eyes. His scars were his credentials.

It is of such a crowning hour for the valorous soul that the centuries speak.

At the end of life's long struggle, a friendly

hand will guide the soul into the presence of One whose "well-done good and faithful servant" will glorify the scars of battle.

Then blindness will be vision; wounds, the uniform of greatness; and our cross, our crown.

XVI

THE INVISIBLE PRESENCE

"But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men."
From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

THE soul which is climbing altar stairs toward perfection is not alone. God attends and shares every struggle and step in the long ascent. Ear may not hear nor eye behold him. He is an invisible presence, but none the less real because unseen.

Among the many promises which pledge to the soul the fellowship of this presence through all the storm and stress of the upward and onward way, there is one which seems to gather in a single angelic measure the full melody of grace,—

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." *

As one listens to the music of such a promise, life is an idyl,—a summer day in the restful

* Isa. 43:2.

country, beside the grassy bank of some crystal stream, under the generous shade of trees, beneath whose leafy bowers the rivulet murmurs its love song to nature. Lying down in such shade and rest; breathing the fresh fragrance of such air; listening to the melody of the limpid waters, as they lave the pebbled edges of the stream or fall in happy abandonment over the mossy stones, catching ever and anon into their measure a bird note from the treetops; how far away seem all the frets and discords, the worries and cares and sufferings of the restless world. It is something of such holy calm and beatific content that the old promise suggests. Who would not sit down beside it and listen to the melody it sings—sweet as was ever any angel's song? Who would not lie down in its generous and protecting shade and have its branches wave and beckon? Who would not breathe its air fresh and fragrant with the presence of God? The world loses its power to hurt, sorrow is solaced, the trials and hardships of life seem far away, and the heart is filled with the blessedness of an ineffable and victorious peace.

What pictures come out of the shadows as the old promise speaks!

The Israelites are on the banks of the Red Sea. A mighty hostile army thunders on their rear. "Go forward" is God's command, and as the people press down into the flood, a way opens through the deep, and they find that closer than

the waters of the sea is the invisible but protecting presence of him who says: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee."

The same people have reached the banks of the Jordan. The freshet-swollen river sweeps its angry yellow tide over all the lowlands. On the farther side is the land of promise. The hour is ripe, and the time of conquest is at hand. As they march into this second flood, they discover that their wall of deliverance again is the presence of him who says: "When thou passest through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

Three Hebrew youths are walking in a furnace of fire. They prefer death to dishonour, and martyrdom to the surrender of their faith. They are not alone. He who said: "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee," is there. Closer than the hot breath of the flames is the invisible presence. They come forth without so much as the smell of fire upon their garments.

God does not leave the soul to struggle on alone. When misfortunes overtake, when trial flames its furnace fires, God is there. He comes down to panoply the soul with himself. He builds around tried and tempted and struggling life the living wall of an invisible but invincible and divine presence.

It is a promise to share rather than to exempt. The two most disastrous agencies known to man are named. One of these,—the flood—origina-

ting in natural forces, and the other,—the fire,—originating in human activities, they together sweep the full gamut of peril and register every disastrous and hurtful influence that may assail human life.

When the sea lifts up its waves and rolls its death dealing waters, man is helpless. When the flame flares in the sky its fiery banner and scorches the air with the hot breath of its hell, man is consumed.

Under these two—fire and flood—God gathers up all misfortunes, trials, hardships, perils, temptations, and says: "I will share them with you."

There is no promise of immunity from these things. God does not say to the soul: "I will keep off the flood and put out the fire." That is what the soul often asks, but it is not what God promises. He has nowhere said: "You shall elude poverty, be exempt from bereavement, and escape adversity." He does not rate worldly ease as important.

Misfortune and adversity are not tokens of divine disfavour. They are not saying that God is hostile. Neither do they indicate that life is a failure.

Success is not softness. It is the achievement of character. It means being true to convictions. One may lose all he has and still succeed. The man who succeeds is he who suffers the loss of all things rather than honour.

When Judas Maccabæus rallied his faithful

eight hundred followers before the Syrian army of twenty thousand, he said: "If our time be come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our honour."

The victory was already won.

Many a life is achieving the highest success in flood and fire. He who, despite all disasters, retains his integrity and declares with Job: "Though he slay me yet will I trust him," is the real king among men.

When Mark Twain's publishing house, Charles L. Webster & Co., failed, owing something over $200,000, the brave humourist assumed the debt as a self-imposed moral obligation. He said: "The law recognises no mortgage on a man's brain, and a merchant who has given up all he has may take advantage of the laws of insolvency, and start free again for himself. But I am not a business man, and honour is a harder master than the law. It cannot compromise for less than a hundred cents on a dollar, and its debts never outlaw."

After six years of hard work in a foreign land Mark Twain returned to America with every cent of the indebtedness cancelled, and was accorded a welcome fit for a king. To be true to duty; to keep memory unsullied by any wrong; to maintain self-respect; to be faithful to a friend, generous to a foe, and upright in all the relations of life—this is success. To gain this, God pledges his help. He makes no offer to take the soul out

of the storm. He does not coddle. He lets all winds play and all fires flame. Indeed it is in the furious centre of the storm that he is to be met. It is when temptation licks its hot breath on human life that God says: "I am with you."

There is something better than immunity from adverse conditions. It is the ability to conquer them. This God offers. Omnipotence shares the struggle and that ensures victory.

God says: "When the waters are swelling around you, I am at your side. When the flames crackle and scorch, I am closer than the fire. When an avalanche of disaster sweeps down, I share the shock. When misfortune sneaks to strike, I am on guard. When death invades the circle of love, I am looking on, and you are safe." He knows and shares all. He puts his shoulder under man's burden, and harnesses himself to man's load. He mingles his tears in human sorrow and takes up into his heart all that troubles his children.

This is the soul's safety, and the pledge of ultimate victory. All floods cannot drown nor all fires consume him who is attended by the invisible presence. No man ever went through a great trial, hand in hand with God, but came out better. No woman ever received from her Lord's hand the sacrament of sorrow, but she arose a fairer saint.

The greatest of trials is for one to confront a trial and find himself alone. It is hard enough

to meet opposition when reënforced by all that religion offers; but to be plunged in darkness and have no faith, to be overtaken by the storm and have no protecting power, to suffer calamity and be without God is to be wretched indeed. When to all this is added the fear that God is not only indifferent but hostile, the conditions of existence become unendurable.

He is to be pitied who steps into the river by himself. His is the greatest trial who, not having learned to trust God in the untroubled hours of life, feels when disaster comes, that he is without God and without hope.

The human heart needs most the assurance that God is a friend. It is not easier conditions, changed laws, kindlier circumstances that the soul needs, but patience, fortitude, perseverance, hope, all of which come with the invisible presence.

Man's most valuable asset is something he cannot see nor hear nor handle with the senses. It is apprehended by the soul in the realm of the spiritual.

The writer once asked Judge John M. Lea, a distinguished Southern jurist, who had reached his 83d year, what was the ground of his acceptance of God. He said: "I have read many books on Christian evidence and listened to many a pulpit polemic but God has come to me by simply accepting his reality on faith. I cannot understand how the insect has life nor how the leaf is

formed on the tree. Why should I expect to understand God? But there is a power that guards insect life and insures to the leaf the laws by which it grows. I believe that the same invisible presence will not fail me, and there I rest." When one reaches that faith ,his soul is as calm as the face of the silent stars.

The fact that God attends the soul, does not lift from it the necessity of effort. Spiritual resources are no excuse for listlessness and indolence. "Faith without works is dead."

The child was orthodox who, being greatly worried over her brother's efforts to entrap the birds, was asked what she did about it and replied: "I prayed that the traps might not catch the birds. Then I prayed that the birds might not go into the traps. Then I went and kicked the traps to pieces."

The invisible presence is no apology for incompetency. One must never do less than his best. But God makes better man's best. He reënforces human weakness with divine strength. Faith taps Omnipotence.

In the shops of the N. C. & St. L. R. R. at Nashville my attention was called to an electric hammer. It is charged with electricity, so that when the workman wields it, he strikes not merely with the strength of one arm, but of a hundred arms. It is something like this which God does for the soul. He endues, empowers, charges it with the dynamic voltage of divinity,

so that as the soul grapples with adverse conditions, it is clothed with conquering might.

Not only does God share flood and fire, but it is there he is closest to the soul. He makes them his shekinah. Many a man has found his God when he has lost his property. Adversity has its compensations. Sorrow is a stronger bond than joy.

> "Eyes that the teacher never schooled
> By wayside graves are raised,
> And lips say 'God be merciful'
> That ne'er said 'God be praised.'"

Some years after the Civil War, Gen'l Robert E. Lee was riding along a dusty road in Virginia, mounted on "Traveller," when he overtook a tattered, weather-beaten mountaineer driving a lean horse harnessed to a rickety cart. In response to the General's pleasant "Good morning sir," the mountaineer brought his horse to a sudden stop, and climbing down from his cart said, "Ain't that General Lee?" "Yes," was the wondering reply, "Well, then," said the countryman excitedly, "I want you to do me a favour." "I will with pleasure if I can," was the response. "All right, get down off of 'Traveller.'" The General dismounted and in some perplexity watched his horse led away and tied in the bushes. The man returned and said: "General Lee I'm one of your old soldiers. I followed you from Mechanicsville to Appomatox. I was with

you in every battle, and now I want you to let me give three rousing cheers for 'Marse Robert'!" The great Confederate leader's head dropped in embarrassment as the first cheer echoed along the mountain side. The next was choked with sobs as the veteran dropped on his knees in the dust of the roadway and hugged his commander's feet; and the third died away in tears. There in their common defeat and adversity the bond which bound those two was stronger and tenderer than in the brightest days of the Confederacy.

God is dearer to the heart when he is all the heart has left. If this be the use of affliction it is far from a disaster. It is worth losing a little to gain a heap. One may lose health, property, position, but if in the struggle he has found God, and out of it he comes attended by the invisible presence, he has made incomparable gain.

Struggle is the law of growth. A child complained to her music teacher that the practice on the keyboard hurt her fingers. "It hurts them but it strengthens them too," said the teacher. To which the child replied: "Teacher, it seems that everything which strengthens, hurts." This is the philosophy of greatness. Struggle is another way of writing strength. But if, through the things which hurt, God becomes more of a reality, pain is pleasure and loss is gain.

Whatever comes is wisely planned and kindly sent. It is from God. Since he sends, it is best. Since he shares, it is sacred.

XVII

STRENGTH FROM ABOVE

"Then welcome each rebuff
That turns Earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

THE fact of sainthood sorely afflicted is too evident to be questioned. Virtue is not trouble-proof. Goodness is not insurance against disaster. Piety is not exempt from temptation. It is a common thing for a man whose life is a ministry of benevolence to be dogged by calamity. It is nothing unusual for a woman whose every step is a mission of mercy to be grievously bereft. Christianity does not promise exemption from pain. It does not say "Throw away your cross" but "Take up your cross." It does not escape life's burdens. It commands them to be borne.

There are but three possible attitudes for the soul to take before such conditions. The first is

rebellion. One may resent his lot. He may rise up in indignant protest against the fate which has overtaken him. He may fling hate into the face of the Supreme Ruler and shout defiance at the Almighty. He may say: "O God, if you exist, lift this burden, right this wrong. If you are there, and what you claim to be, clear my sky and make me happy. If you fail, I deny you and defy your law."

Thus some meet trouble. It is the worst course to follow. It changes nothing. The burden is not lightened and no added strength is gained. The bird may wear out its wings fighting the bars of its cage, but that will not give it freedom. The prisoner may strike his head against the stone wall of his dungeon and exhaust his strength grappling the iron grating, but he is a prisoner still. Man may denounce his Maker, and curse fate, but he has not made lighter his load. Rebellion is not redemption.

The second attitude is endurance. One may meet his lot with stoical firmness. He may recognise it as inevitable and with patient fortitude and heroic submission make the best of things. He may say: "What can't be cured must be endured," and without a murmur stagger on under his load.

Some hunters in the Tennessee mountains emerged into an open where stood a log cabin, around whose door-way gathered a half dozen tow-headed, barefooted children. When the guns

sounded, the eldest child, a boy about twelve years of age, was off with the hunters. He followed them over mountain and valley, across stream and through bramble-patches. As he emerged from a tangled mass of blackberry bushes the hunters noticed that his bare shins, from the knees to the ankles, were streaming with blood. One of them expressed sympathy. "That's nothin'" said the boy. "Doesn't it hurt?" "Hurt? You bet it hurts." "What are you going to do about it?" "Just let it hurt."

That is one way to meet the ills of life, and the moral courage which bears without a whine the hurts of fate and endures with sheer strength of soul the agony of pain is sublime. Nevertheless there is no particular virtue in suffering merely for the sake of it. Martyrdom that may be avoided borders on suicide. Endurance is not redemption.

The third attitude is victory. One may conquer his burden, until weights are changed to pinions, and crosses to weapons.

This is the Christian way, and the only way for the soul that would ascend. It is precisely what religion proposes to enable the soul to do.

Paul carried a burden which he called "a thorn in the flesh." It seemed to impede him. He called it "a messenger of Satan to buffet him." It tormented him night and day, and like a sharp thorn stabbed into his life and clung to him with torturing tenacity. It seemed not quite

fair that in addition to all his other trials, he should be tormented by this emissary of the devil. He asked God to remove it. He became very earnest and asked a second time. He grew desperate and offered a third prayer for deliverance. The only answer he got was the assurance that God's grace would sustain him.* God seemed to say "I will not lighten your burden, but I will increase your strength until the load shall cease to be a burden." When Paul heard this he was satisfied. When he discovered that his "thorn in the flesh" was God's chance to manifest his strength in Paul's career, the apostle ceased to murmur and began to glory in his infirmity.

"My grace is sufficient for thee" is God's proffer and pledge of sufficient and sustaining strength in every time of need. It is the declaration of the Almighty that whosoever trusts him shall not be confounded. It is the guarantee of the King of kings to every leal subject in his wide domain of ample and abiding protection.

It is not necessary to whine. Sustaining grace changes the thorn in the flesh to a sword in the hand. Life needs not less of duty but more of strength, not lighter burdens but broader shoulders and stouter arms. It is an impossible task for the engine without fire and steam to pull its load, but when the fires are glowing and the pent up steam is in the boilers and the throttle is

*2d Cor. 12:9.

thrown, the task is not to start the engine but to control its speed.

Not rebel, nor stoic, but conqueror is the soul panoplied by grace for the struggle with adversity.

God gives songs in the night and he does not care for a man to go around with his head hung down like a broken bulrush.

A saintly woman, tried for weary months by painful illness which ended at the grave, said to the writer one afternoon shortly before she passed away: "I've such a lovely robin that sings outside my window. In the early morning as I lie here, he serenades me." Then as a beautiful smile lit up the wan suffering face, she added: "I love him because he sings in the rain." That is the glorious thing about the robin. When the storm has silenced the lay of the other songbirds, the robin sings on in the rain. It is even so with the triumphant soul. The storm is not a peril, for sustaining grace changes hurts into helps, and loads into lifts.

It does this by dividing the load. One may not be able to carry a ton at a time, but divide it into two thousand pound parcels and the task is easy. Life is crushed by anticipated burdens. We try to fight to-morrow's battle to-day, and carry next week's burdens now. We borrow trouble from the future and our deepest solicitude is for that which never comes to pass.

God shuts the life to the present moment and

says: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." * His promise is: "As thy days so shall thy strength be." † One may not be able to stand up under the burdens of a decade, and yet he may go merrily under the burdens of an hour.

"God broke our lives to hours and days,
That hour by hour,
And day by day,
Just going on a little way
We might be able, all along
To keep quite strong.

"Should all the weights of life
Be laid across our shoulders, and the future, rife
With woe and struggle, meet us face to face
At just one place,
We could not go;
Our feet would stop, and so
God lays a little on us every day,

"And never, I believe, on all the way
Will burdens bear so deep,
Or pathways lie so steep
But we can go, if by God's power
We only bear the burden of the hour."

Grace also sustains by its interpretation of life. Hardship is discipline, and its product is force of character. God is fashioning the soul into the image of Christ, and it still pleases him to make "perfect through suffering." He is working

* Matth. 6:34. † Deut. 33:25.

with eternity in view. This life is but a second-stroke in the clock of the ages. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

In New Jersey there is a splendid stone statue carved out of a single solid block which weighed in the rough thirteen tons. The finished statue weighs six tons. With mallet and chisel and sand paper, the sculptor worked on until he had cut away half the stone, but he had loosed from its rock prison the angel of his dream. Six tons of statue are worth more than thirteen tons of crude stone.

With hardship and trial, with privation and adversity, the Master-Sculptor goes to work on the crude, undisciplined soul. He seems to reduce it. He is only loosing from flesh-fetters the sanctified spirit. Existence may seem to bulk less, but while flesh outweighs spirit, spirit outlives and out-values flesh. Instead of crying out against hammer-blows and chisel-strokes, it were better to rejoice that God sees an angel in the stone and toils to set it free.

Another way in which grace sustains is by making the burden not only discipline but deliverance. Many a man's trials have been his salvation. His misfortune has become a weapon in the soul's dire peril.

Amos R. Wells, the Editor of the Christian Endeavour World, has beautifully expressed this ministry of grace in a little poem, which he calls "My Burden."—

God laid upon my back a grievous load,
A heavy cross to bear along the road.

I staggered on, and lo! one weary day,
An angry lion sprang across my way.

I prayed to God, and swift at His command
The cross became a weapon in my hand.

It slew my raging enemy, and then
Became a cross upon my back again.

I faltered many a league, until at length,
Groaning, I fell, and had no further strength.

"Oh God," I cried, "I am so weak and lame!"
Then straight my cross a wingéd staff became.

It swept me on till I regained the loss,
Then leaped upon my back, again a cross.

I reached a desert. O'er the burning track
I persevered, the cross upon my back.

No shade was there, and in the cruel sun
I sank at last, and thought my days were done.

But lo! the Lord works many a blest surprise—
The cross became a tree before my eyes!

I slept; I woke, to feel the strength of ten.
I found the cross upon my back again.

And thus through all my days, from that to this,
The cross, my burden, has become my bliss;

Nor ever shall I lay the burden down,
For God some day will make the cross a crown!

In addition to all this, and chiefly, grace sustains by the immediate bestowment of divine strength to the soul in its time of need. One passes through a great crisis of life, and wonders how the hour was met. It called for more than human wisdom and endurance. The victory was won when, in the oratory of prayer, the soul received its baptism of power from on high.

It is God's strength that is promised. The promise does not say "Thy strength shall be sufficient for thee," but "my strength." The very power of Almighty God is communicated to the soul and in that might the conflict is waged and the victory won.

Does this seem fanatical? The trolley wire is a weak and helpless thing in itself. Break its connection with the dynamo and it cannot lift a pound nor budge an inch, but charge it from the power-house and it becomes irresistible. If a force under human control can so transfer its strength to a dull, insensate thing like a wire, shall it be thought incredible that the supreme force of the universe should communicate his power to the eager and passionate soul?

This is God's plan, and its operation makes the soul's victory over all that opposes not only possible but actual.

The way will never be so steep, but it can be climbed; the river so deep but it can be crossed; the furnace fires so hot, but they can be endured. Temptation will never be so fierce but it can be

throttled; sorrow so crushing, but it can be comforted; bereavement so utter but it can be survived, nor adversity's night so black, but morning light will gleam.

God has promised strength from above. It is his part to keep the promise; the soul's to watch and pray, to work and wait, to trust and triumph.

XVIII

THE TERMINALS OF LOVE

"What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink
i' the scale."

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

ONE travels toward the thing he loves, slowly it may be, but surely; drawn thither by an unseen but irresistible force. The terminals of love are the things loved. Man goes where his heart is. He becomes what he worships. He grows into the image and likeness of that which he adores.

Hosea says the Israelites became "abominable like that which they loved." * They elected to serve Baal and Astarte instead of Jehovah, and substituted the lascivious and abominable rites of an infamous and iniquitous idolatry for the august and inspiring worship of the temple. The result was the lapse of a nation into a carnival of vice.

The same result will follow in the career of any nation which supplants love of the good with lust

* Hos. 9: 10. R. V.

for gain and passion for pleasure. The nation whose chief question is: "How much is a man worth?" will become a huge stock exchange and its people a race of money grubbers. The nation which loves war will become a standing army, and its citizens will judge by the standard of might rather than right. The nation which tolerates vice and permits the wanton violation of laws against Sabbath desecration and institutional sin will become a nation of pleasure seekers, and its people a race of libertines.

The man who deliberately sells himself to dishonesty, impurity, lasciviousness, and sordid greed, will turn to the thing for which he has perjured his soul. The individual who leads a double life may hide his infamy for awhile, but sooner or later the duplicity within breaks out on the surface. The heart which entertains unclean imaginations and vile suggestions and which delights in and loves these abominations will become as foul as its filthy tenants. The terminal of a wicked love is a wicked character. An unholy love drives toward depravity of soul and degradation of life as resistlessly as the catapult projects its missile or the cannon hurls its conquering shot.

Dirt leaves its mark. No one can fall on his knees before sin, and rise the same. The rites of false faiths have seamed their votaries. Infanticide, child-widowhood, wife-murder, lust-worship, and the catalogue of nameless deprav-

ities about which a clean lip must be dumb are only the inevitable consequences of the law of moral terminals.

It seems a harmless thing to give sin its fling for a day or a week. It is only a digression from the main track of virtue. What damage can result? It is the damage of derailing the engine and ditching the train. Vice is never a sidetrack of virtue.

The law of moral terminals is as patent on the right side of life as on the wrong. One may lift the word "abominal" out of Hosea's indictment, and, substituting "adorable," make the law read, "They become adorable like that which they love." This is just as true.

The nation which encourages the arts and sciences, which fosters education and puts the premium on honesty, purity, philanthropy and reverence will find its citizens becoming all that is noble and best. The nation which safeguards homes; maintains the sanctity of the Sabbath; and builds between tempted human life and the grog-shop, the bagnio and the gambling hell the barriers of imperious and unyielding statutes will find itself becoming more and more a nation of righteous men and virtuous women, of happy homes and prosperous churches.

The man who gives himself to the practice of goodness becomes good. The woman who denies self in an act of unselfish sacrifice rises into a nobler self. He whose ideals are clean, sin-

cere, kindly and earnest, will become what he seeks. The soul's terminals are its loves, and the way for a man to lift himself out of a bog is to set his heart on a star.

Light leaves its mark too. The sunshine which kissed the rosebud yesterday has made it a different flower to-day. Not a leaf of the tree, not a sprig of springing grass, not a petal of the blooming flower is the same as it was before it turned its face to the Sun, and said: "O Sun, I love you." The green in leaf, the crimson in flower, the emerald in grass, the amber in sky, the gold in cloud is all captured, imprisoned, transformed, appropriated sunshine.

It is the same in the spiritual. The man at anvil or desk, the woman at cradle or hearthstone, the child at book or play who lifts the heart's adoration toward Him who is the source of ineffable light and beauty and cries: "O Son, Son of God and Light of men, I love you," will be changed into the supernal image and likeness of Him he adores.

Perhaps it seems a trifling thing to silence temptation; an obscure and unimportant thing to cherish a high thought, a noble aspiration, a generous impulse; a trifle in the day's long list of trifles when one pauses to express all this in patient kindly word or helping deed. But it puts the tracery of its greatness on the soul and leaves the spirit higher up on the table lands of character, where the air is clean and the sky is clear.

The tremendous grasp which this fact has on life becomes more apparent as the laws which reënforce it are considered. There are at least five of these laws which may be mentioned. The fact under consideration may be regarded as a hand and these five laws as so many mighty muscled ligaments running down into the thumb and fingers of the hand giving it strength and tenacity of grip as it closes about personality and holds destiny in its relentless grasp.

The first is the law of association. We associate with the people and things we love. Occasionally it may be with the disagreeable, but always under protest. Our associations are determined by our loves. But we grow like our associations. It is a law which runs through all realms. Travellers have noticed that the flowers of Sicily are unusually brilliant in their colouring. Scientists have explained the phenomenon by the volcanic character of the Sicilian soil. The husband and wife grow alike as the years of a happy-wedlock go by. Traits admired are unconsciously reproduced. Two roses cannot grow side by side without mutual influence, and much less two souls—the most impressible of all God's creation.

When Moses came down from the mount where he had talked with God, his face shone with such brightness that the people could not bear the sight. It was the effect of the law of

association. He had been with God, and had caught upon his own the glory from God's face.

The second law is that of development. Development is in the direction of effort. The whole theory of evolution is based on this fact. Man has struggled to grasp and after awhile through long ages of effort, he has grown a hand. He has struggled to enter the realm of light, and after awhile, through long ages of effort, he has grown an eye. In the same way he has evolved an ear, a nose, a foot, and all the other organs of the body. In the same manner, it is affirmed, he has achieved intelligence and the moral sense. There are those who believe that at present man is evolving a sixth sense, with which he shall invade the realm of spirit-life, and hold communion with those in the disembodied state. How much of this is fact, and how much baseless speculation, is not important for the present purpose. Whether evolution be regarded as having won its cause, or as still being on trial, it is a fact that in the realm of character, the soul develops in the direction of its effort. What it strives to do it tends to be. But back of effort is love. That which is sought is that which is desired. It may not be obtained but the toil is in its pursuit.

A third law is that of activity. Not only are the things sought the things loved, but deeds are determined by desires. Man is a reasoning creature whose volitions issue from a mind where

judgment and desire are not hostile but harmonious. Even when sacrifice is deliberately preferred, it is because the nature craves it as the best.

What one does, he tends to become. Deeds leave their impress. A man's vocation stamps itself on his personality. It registers itself in muscle-fibres and brain tissues, in features of face and habits of mind, and not less in the central fabric of soul.

Imitation is the fourth law. Man has not entirely overcome that tendency. He unconsciously reproduces his fellows in act and speech, in customs, sentiments and views. He has not entirely emancipated himself from a tendency which suggests undesirable progenitors. If this law be studied in conjunction with the laws of development and activity, its important bearing on the growth of the soul becomes apparent.

The fifth is the law of personality. Sooner or later the thing which is in the heart gets out. It cannot be confined. It rises to the eye, it colours the face, it controls the hand, it speaks from the lip, it changes the whole man. The face has been compared to a dial plate which registers the hour the soul is striking. It is a bulletin board announcing what is taking place within. There are some faces which are base with the "ruin of the ten commandments," and others which are beatific with the beatitudes.

This is perhaps the explanation of the dying

vision of the proto-martyr, "I see the Son of Man," * cried Stephen as his enemies "gnashed on him with their teeth." It was the victorious apocalypse of his heart's adoration. Jesus was the passion of Stephen's soul, and in that supreme moment, the mystic presence of the heart became the rapt vision of the eye.

These then are the five laws which centre their power in the truth that one becomes like that which he loves,—the laws of association, development, activity, imitation, and personality.

It is easy, from this, to understand why God asks for the heart. It is the citadel of the life.

His first request is not for man's time. That is not much—seventy years at best,—and what are seventy years to the God of ages?

It is not for money. That is not much either. The average man leaves about as much as Simon Peter did when he became a disciple—a leaky boat and some broken nets.

It is not for thought. That is not as valuable as one sometimes imagines. Human thought is not profound. It takes itself too seriously.

It is not even for influence. God wants that of course, but it is not considerable—only the ripple of a single tiny pebble in the vast sea of being.

The first and strongest plea is for love. "Give me thy heart." The reason is not merely that our love carries with it all we have, but chiefly

* Acts 7: 56.

that it carries us with it. As goes the heart, so goes the life. The soul that loves the best will reach the best.

Hence arises the supreme importance of devotion to Jesus Christ. He is the best, the soul's sovereign ideal, and the complete satisfaction of its divinest aspirations.

One should be a Christian not only for the sake of more comfortable conditions in the world to come and not only for the sake of more comfortable conditions in the world that is now, but chiefly for the sake of his own spiritual growth. The limit of a man's capacity for enjoyment in the world to come and the measure of his usefulness in the world that is now is himself. If he is to rise, he must grow like Christ. If he is to grow like Christ, he must love him. That is the gateway to the land of the immortals. As one sets his quest thither, he is rising, by a sure way, to heights "where that which is perfect is come." *

*1 Cor. 13: 10, 13.

XIX

THE UNEARTHLY CHRIST

"Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's
true play."

From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

ONE sees what he seeks, finds what he claims, and becomes what he believes.

One summer day in company with a hundred young fellows gathered from Southern colleges, I went through Mr. Vanderbilt's princely estate, "Biltmore," near Asheville, N. C. Some of us were in carriages, some on horseback, some on bicycles.

It was an afternoon when nature was in her best mood, and that most magnificent country place on this continent wore its most attractive garb.

We drove along the banks of the Swannanoa, whose softly murmuring waters were crooning the river's melody to the beauty of the world. By the roadside wild vines were clambering over tree and stone, and brilliant-hued blooming

flowers were decking the fields with colour and lading the air with delicious perfume. Here and yonder a crystal lake or pool, embraced in a circlet of living green flashed back the sunlight. There at the summit of the drive and commanding a landscape of entrancing beauty was the stately mansion, while near at hand and far away the blue towering mountains were silhouetted against an amber sky. It was a sight sublime enough to pulse a clod with inspiration.

As we were driving out the exit gate, one of the students riding a bicycle passed our carriage. Some one cried out to him, "How did you like it?"

"Fine," was the reply. "It's the best road for wheels I ever was on."

That was all he had seen—just a narrow track for a pneumatic tire; no flower, nor tree, nor daisied field; no glimpse of mountain life, nor flush of summer sky; no breath from flowering vine, nor note from singing river. His soul was hobbled to his feet and the only world he saw was a dirt road.

A man's ideals rule him. A real estate agent who had just returned from a visit to Egypt and the Holy Land was asked what he thought of the Pyramids. "Very large buildings," he replied, "but badly out of repair." It was a landlord's view. It was with very different feelings that the Emperor Napoleon looked upon those hoary monuments of antiquity. As he drew up his sol-

diers under the shadow of the Pyramids, the man of destiny said: "Soldiers of France, remember that thirty centuries are looking down upon you." That was the vision of a world-conqueror. The difference between the two men was the difference in their ideals.

In the ascent of the soul, the lifting power is the unearthly Christ. He is the faultless model of the highest human living. He is the fullest embodiment of truth, the clearest revelation of perfect character, the sweetest pattern of faultless conduct.

As the soul comes under the spell of his inspiring personality it is transformed into his glorious image, seeing what it seeks, finding what it claims, and becoming what it believes.

When he is called "the unearthly Christ," the meaning is not that Christ is in any sense unreal, nor that Christianity is mystical or mythical. The man of Galilee is not a tradition. He is an historical character, and the evidence for all that will be claimed for him is ample.

Neither is it meant that Christ is only or chiefly a Saviour for an unearthly realm, nor that the blessings he confers are to be enjoyed principally in some disembodied state. There is an impression that Christ can help dead people, but that he is not able to do much for flesh and blood. He can make the soul happy after it gets to heaven, but he is not expected to do as much for it in this wicked world. If Christ cannot save

here, can he save anywhere? If he can do nothing for us on Earth, may we not fear to trust him off the Earth? He must be a present Saviour if he is any sort of a Saviour.

Neither is it meant to challenge the humanity of Christ, when he is called "unearthly." The inference is not that Christ only seemed to be human, or lived any other than a truly human life.

He was a man and lived under the same conditions as any other man. His body was subject to the same limitations. He ate the same food, breathed the same air, wore the same clothes, saw the same scenery and touched the same duties. He grew hungry and thirsty and tired. He was no spectral wraith but substantial flesh and blood.

He was interested in all that affects human living. He loved people and was deeply sympathetic. Their troubles were his and their triumphs. He shared the joys and sorrows of his fellows. He was profoundly alive to all that was going on around him. The world was his absorbing study. He plunged into the thick of its activities, studied its questions, preached and taught about its duties, and in everything that he did and said was intensely practical.

We cannot give up the humanity of Jesus Christ. He was not some cold intellectual spark of divinity. He entered into all life and shared and sanctified whatever affects man.

Nevertheless Christ is not the product of Earth. That is what is meant when he is called "un-

earthly." Earth is an adequate explanation for the average life but not for the Man of Galilee. Its schools could not produce such a teacher, nor its society such a leader, nor its temples such a prophet and preacher, nor its homes such a friend.

There is an earthly explanation for the world's great warriors, statesmen, philanthropists, discoverers. Cromwell, Washington, Gladstone, even Shakespeare can be explained.

One may analyse such lives, define their constructive forces, and understand how they issued as they did.

Jesus of Nazareth defies an explanation that is level to Earth. As easily account for the Sun by a lucifer match, or the stars by the sparks from a smokestack as for Christ by Earth.

He was not the offspring of Earth, nor the outcome of time. He was no product of an evolutionary process. He came from above, and belonged to an unearthly line. He was sustained by an unearthly power, wielded an unearthly authority, dwelt in unearthly peace, died an unearthly death, and is worshipped with an unearthly reverence and adoration.

Jesus was more than a good man. There are those who have honest doubts about his divinity. They approve his life and teaching. They endorse the way he lived, and declare it is the way all should live. But they cannot believe he was "divine."

Terms are not much. He is not affected by an adjective. Strike out "divine" if it is desired. The fact remains that he was something we are not. He is above all the rest of us and stands solitary in his greatness and goodness. He was a man for whom Earth has no adequate explanation. This places him on the topmost pinnacle of being, clothes him with ability to save, and invests him with the august power of the soul's reigning and redeeming ideal.

The unearthliness of Christ is seen in the power he wielded. Whatever view one may take of his miracles, it must be admitted that he did what no one else did, or has done since. Whether they are regarded as the product of superior knowledge or superior power they are unmatched.

Things as wonderful are taking place,—the telephone, the phonograph, wireless telegraphy, etc.—but these modern miracles are explained and understood.

Disease never baffled Jesus of Nazareth. Medical science reaches a point when all pellets and prescriptions fail, where all surgical instruments and hospitals become unavailing. Jesus had an unearthly power over disease and healed sickness as easily as he breathed. He routed death. Death throws earth into despair, but Christ never regarded death as possessing any rights to be respected. It could not last in his presence. He broke up every funeral, and burst open every

tomb. He let death lock its icy fetters around him, and seal him in its tomb. Then as easily as one steps through the yielding air, he slipped its fetters, and conquered death.

Such was Christ's power. Whether there is to come a day in the soul's ascent when it shall stand on this height with Christ and wield the same power over nature, disease and death, who will say? Why may not the soul hope for such development? If however it is to come, its source will not be earthly. The power must come from above and not below. Christ's power was not earth-born. One may call it by what adjective he pleases, but it is not down in the catalogue of earthly forces, nor listed by the earthly sciences, nor accounted for by calling Christ "a good man."

This, however, is the least important characteristic of the unearthly Christ.

He was unearthly in his greatness. Judged by all the standards by which we measure greatness, he was great. Placed in the company of the world's noblest spirits, surrounded by the choicest of Earth's heroes, philosophers, philanthropists, poets, and prophets, he towers high above them all. He is the colossal figure of all history. He has influenced life as none other. To cancel Christ from human history would be to wreck civilisation, mangle literature, ruin art, and take from man the motive which stirs to highest think-

ing the noblest doing; and which sustains courage, prompts philanthropy, glorifies sacrifice and inspires love.

Christ's greatness will not be questioned. What is its source? Earth has not made him great. The things which make men great, in an earthly way, such as wealth, position, genius, numbers, Christ despised. He was poor and humble. The Galilean fishermen had more property than their Master. Peter was a greater orator than Jesus; Paul a better logician. Jesus was axiomatic rather than argumentative, intuitive rather than intellectual.

Christ did not even care for the elements of human greatness. Money, fame, numbers had no attraction for him. They simply did not appeal to him. They could no more influence him than dust the stars.

Indeed Christ was great not because of earth but in spite of it. Earth did its best to keep him down. It arrayed all its forces against him. At last it put him to a shameful death. But in Christ there was a greatness Earth could neither obscure nor imperil. He was in the world but not of it. He was controlled by an unearthly ideal, and that ideal was his "Father in heaven." The world could not disturb him. He was calm amid its storms and full of peace in its wildest tempests. Hunted and persecuted, he was not perturbed. He pursued his sublime way as confidently as the sun its path across the sky. When

Earth was doing its utmost to fill him with alarm, he looked contempt and disdain on all its efforts, and turning to his disciples said "Peace, I leave with you." * The thing Earth tried most to destroy was the thing Christ had most of to bequeath.

Could a mere man have gone into such a conflict, fought unaided such a battle, and come out so victorious? It is inconceivable. Christ brings to man a greatness earth can neither create nor destroy. Earth could no more keep him down than wraiths of mist on the eastern horizon can tie down the rising sun to the hilltops.

The most striking feature of Christ's unearthliness remains to be considered. He was unearthly in his ambition. Christendom has stressed the question of Christ's divinity and made that the key-dogma of orthodoxy. It has ranked churchmen according to their views on this subject. Christ does not seem to stress the dogma. He was concerned not so much that men should know who he was before he came, as who he was and how he lived after he came. In his letter to the Philippian Christians, Paul says: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (*i. e.* a prize to be striven after) to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation."† The prize for which Christ strove was not to prove

* John 14:27. † Phil. 2:5-7.

his equality with God but to make himself of no reputation for love's sake. He was not ambitious to vindicate his divinity. That would have been the earthly way. Human greatness wants all its due. It clamours for its place in the procession, insists on the exploitation of all its titles, claims all its honours at dress-parade, and is never so enraged as when these things are obscured.

Christ was ambitious to show not how high he could go in station, but how low he could stoop in service. He emptied himself and made himself of no reputation. He might have amazed Earth with the revelation of his glory. He might have startled and dazed men with some court scene in the celestial realm, where he sits, equal with the Father, receiving the homage of angels and archangels; but he did not care to do so. It was not his ambition. Instead we see him sitting by Jacob's well comforting the wretched woman, stopping a procession to heal the hurt of one too timid to do more than touch the hem of his garment, listening to a blind beggar's prayer, going home with a publican, girding himself with a towel and washing his disciples' feet.

This is the strongest evidence that Christ was not the product of Earth. His was not the world's way. It was a higher and a better way. It was God's way. Jesus was God's way. He was God's human life. He came down not to conform to the world's ways but to transform the world to his way.

Two men were standing on the dikes at New Orleans when the great flood in the Mississippi river seemed to doom the city. One said to the other: "What would you do for the city if you had the strength and the money?" Taken somewhat by surprise at the question his companion answered: "What would you do, as you seem to have been thinking about the matter?" "O," said the first man "if I had the power and the money, I would build these dikes so wide and so high, that no flood could endanger the city. This would seem to be the height of philanthropy." "I would not do that," the other man replied, "If I had the strength I would get my arms beneath the city and lift it above the dikes so that no flood could ever endanger it." That is what Christ does for men. He stoops to lift human life above the danger line.

Jesus has entered into human sorrow in order to comfort it. He shares human pain, in order to cure it. He endures human death, in order to conquer it. He came not to show the way the greatest of Earth lives, but the way a greater than Earth serves.

Christ's unearthliness is his message to men. He did not come to say: "Your world is good enough, your way is fair enough," but to reveal a way and world vastly better than man has imagined. He is the product of the new heavens and the new earth, where greatness is to be achieved not by stressing such things as wealth,

station, fame, but by stooping to that which is now despised. He teaches that man is great as he is unselfish, as he loves his neighbour, as he serves.

For this message in its first and fullest form, one must go to Christ. He will not learn it in the schools nor get it from science. They may utter the message but they do not originate it. They may flash the light, but they do not create it. One must sit at the feet of the lowly Nazarene and learn of him "who went about doing good." As he listens to the message and reproduces it in himself he is coming into the unearthly greatness of Christ, and helping to usher in a regenerated world.

Earth is to be lifted into heaven on the shoulders of those who have seen Christ.

His unearthliness is the explanation of his enduring greatness. Jesus is more regnant in human life than ever. His gospel has a wider sweep. His truth settles more problems. Had his greatness been earthly, it would long since have gone the way of all the earth. Memory loses all names but his. Monuments crumble and mausoleums fall into decay, but Christ needs neither to perpetuate his fame. When all else is in ruins, when the great names of history are forgotten, when Earth's populous cities perish and its civilisations pass, when the planet shall be dissolved and, changed once more into fire dust,

shall be swept on the wings of the universal ether in the making of its successor, Jesus, the light of the world, will flame forth in undiminished splendour and the cross will still blazon the way to glory.

The greatness of Christ is the pledge and prophecy of the hereafter life. Time cannot tire it, nor death quench it. Forgetfulness has no knife and oblivion no grave for such greatness. Christ is somewhere and will be when Earth's last picture is painted, last syllable is uttered, and last deed is done.

Around the unearthly Christ heaven will spring up. If there be a safe and happy place in the universe, it must be near him. Such a personality transforms the desert into paradise. Heaven is a country where the greatness of Christ is not supernatural but ordinary; not an isolated incident in the sweep of centuries, but the common habit of existence; not merely an ideal to be gazed at and adored but an experience to be shared and shown forth in all character and conduct.

This is the greatness which Christ confers on the soul worshipping him. As it is achieved the soul changes its residence from the swamps to the stars, and its business from building sand-heaps along the changing beach of time to sharing in the vocations of eternity.

Christ proffers a greatness which puts the world beneath its feet, despises its cares, con-

quers its storms, survives its perils, endures its disasters, and maintains in all its restlessness a perfect peace. It defies all change, and defeats all decay. Death cannot hinder nor the grave confine it. It leaps the void between two worlds, achieves immortality and occupies heaven.

XX

THE REINCARNATION

"Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a god
though in the germ."
From Rabbi Ben Ezra.

It is one thing to imitate, it is another to incarnate. In the ascent of the soul, to incarnate Christ is a higher experience than his imitation.

One day a gardener let a tiny seed down into the earth. He covered it with the soil and left it to do as it pleased in the cramped underground chamber, where its only companions were silence and darkness. By and by when none but God was looking on, the seed rent its robe from neck to hem, and laying aside the garment which encased it, started for the upper world of light and air. One morning the world saw a green sprig start from the dull face of a dead clod. It grew larger and bolder with every passing day, claiming succour from soil, moisture from the air and colour from the light. On and on it grew, until here and there little balls began to take shape and

form, which swelled and flowered and burst in beauteous bloom, distilling sweetest fragrance. The tiny seed had expressed itself. It had unfolded, and through the mystery of life, had realised its hope of glory.

Soon the autumnal winds swept the colour from its petals and touched its foliage with sombre tints; but ere the shrub fell it grew at the base of every dead blossom tiny seeds like its own, dowered with the same potential beauties and destined to the same ministry of sweetness and cheer.

It was something like this in the highest realm of being, which came to pass in what has come to be called "the incarnation." It is something like this in the same realm, which is coming to pass in what is coming to be called "the reincarnation."

One day the great Gardener let a germ of divine life down into the world. In some strange, mysterious way "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us."* One morning men saw a spark of divinity flash in the dull face of an earth clod. Jesus was born at Bethlehem. The child of Christ grew in stature and in favour with God and man. He gathered from the world in which he dwelt its best, and from above God's light and love, until his character flowered with the fairest virtues and was fragrant with the sweetest minis-

*Jno. 1:14.

tries. The seed of God-hood had expressed itself: "and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." *

Then came the autumnal winds, and he who had healed the sick and raised the dead, died on the cross and was laid in a tomb. As he fell there arose around him those who had partaken of his life, and who were destined to perpetuate his ministry of sweetness and cheer. To these and their successors, the promise is "Christ in you the hope of glory." †

Thus the incarnation perpetuates itself. Just as a rosebush empties its beauty and fragrance into the future from the cup of seeds at the base of the blossom, so Jesus pours his life into his followers.

"We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ," § Paul writes to the Corinthian churches. The Christian tastes like Christ. Regeneration is reincarnation. It is the great Gardener planting the divine seed in the soil of human life. Conversion is the unfolding of that germ in the incidents of individual character and destiny.

The Christian is something of Christ. To him Christ is not merely a figure of history, a theological formula, an inspiring ideal to be believed about and imitated. He is within him, as really

* Jno. 1:4. † Col. 1:27. § II Cor. 2:15.

as he was in the flesh of Mary's child. This is the mystery of true greatness, the hope of glory —the indwelling, immanent Christ.

To plant the seed is the work of the gardener. To form Christ within the soul is the work of God. Just how and when must be left to him. "The kingdom cometh not with observation." * It is hard to tell where night ends and day begins. It is harder to date that boundary line between night and day in the soul, when self goes out and Christ comes in. There may burst upon us all at once the glad discovery that morning has come. Further than this we need not dogmatise.

If one is receptive, that is if he has faith, God selects him as suitable soil and plants Christ there. Christ within is the hope of glory.

What is packed into the glory-seed?

Character is there. Character is one thing God classifies as glory. Henry Drummond was not far wrong when he made "character" and "glory" synonymous terms in Bible usage.

The man is greater than his tools.

Paganini took up a violin before his audience, and touched it. The strings began to snap. First one and then another broke, and the people smiled at the artist's discomfiture. Finally Paganini, as though nothing had happened, played on one string, and people ceased to smile,

* Luke 17:20.

and listened spell-bound. The man was greater than his fiddle.

What one has is always less than what he is. Character is glory. Christ in the soul is the hope of character.

Sometimes one tries to achieve it by his own exertions, by will-power, culture, association. All these are valuable, but they omit the essential. Culture will not make a tree grow fruit, unless it be a fruit tree to begin with. The bramble will never become a fir by trying. Neither can fallen human nature achieve kinship to God merely by struggle. There must be the impartation of the life. Christ is God's way of making character. He was himself the best the world has known. Men may criticise his church, his disciples, the book which reveals him, and the creeds which claim him; but they do not criticise him. Someone may propose an expurgated edition of the Bible, but no one is blasphemous enough to suggest an expurgated edition of Jesus Christ.

Gohre declares that only one quality of religion remains—"respect and reverence for Jesus Christ. It is, indeed, a new picture of Jesus of Nazareth. He lacks the supernatural light in his eyes; the divinity, assigned to him by the theologians is a subject for smiles; . . . . . but they all stand reverently and quiet before his personality."

God's way of making character is to let Christ down into a human life. Jesus pours himself into

his followers. He pervades them. He charges human motives, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations with the electric current of celestial influence, until the individual is suffused with the glow of the divine presence.

No matter how low down the life may be to begin with, Christ is the hope of character. To the abandoned and profligate, with weak wills and weaker ways; to the imbruted, besotted, and outcast, Christ is an uplifting and transforming power.

The transformation may be gradual, but it is nevertheless certain.

One afternoon running down to Princeton on a late train, the writer saw, from the car window, a glorious sunset beyond the Jersey hills. Low banks of sullen leaden clouds lay along the western horizon. Directly the king of day began to shoot arrows of light into the banks of blackness. Then the Sun himself entered the pavilion of cloud, and the west changed from grey to saffron. Soon the sky was aflame with golden glory and seemed to be transformed into a radiant temple of holy light. In less time almost than it takes to tell the cathedral doors swung open, and the great round golden Sun showed himself in distinct outline, with just enough of the drapery of cloud upon his face to let the eye endure the sight, but not enough to obscure. Then the lustrous orb sank from sight to make it morning for the people on the other side of the world.

It is somewhat after this fashion that Christ transforms a human life. There may be naught of light or beauty at the start, but when he enters the transformation begins. Darkness is dispelled, and sullen, sombre clouds are shot through with living glory. The life becomes a temple. Sometimes, down on the verge of the twilight-hour the change is so complete that as men look into the face of Christ's disciple they behold Christ himself. There is just enough of the drapery of flesh to make the sight endurable, but not enough to obscure the glorious image of the indwelling Lord. Then comes the incident of death, which for all such character, is but transit to the morning world.

There is another kind of glory to which we have given the name of "peace." Christ in the rising soul is the hope of perfect peace. It is something for which every heart sighs. In the midst of this fretful, tempestuous, uncertain life, where no one may hope to escape misrepresentation and disappointment, the soul longs for rest. The past is a spectre, the future a dread, the present a nightmare. Is there no quiet haven safely sheltered from the storms which sweep the open sea, into which our boat may drop anchor? No gentle eddy beside the tortuous, turbulent stream on which we are launched, into whose quiet waters our barque may turn its prow?

"Rest, rest for the weary; peace, peace to the soul."

Christ has promised to answer the prayer.

He possessed peace. Never was a life so hedged about with unrest, and yet amid the wild tumult and reign of noisy discontent and selfish clamour, Jesus stood calm and undisturbed. His last bequest is peace. "My peace I give unto you." * His method of fulfilling his promise is to give himself. If he is within, he has made the human struggle his. Once on Galilee, when the disciples were tossed by the tempest, they went to Jesus who was asleep in the boat, and awaking him said: "Carest thou not that we perish?" Jesus rebuked not only their lack of faith, but their lack of sense. They might have known that the boat could not go down without carrying Jesus too. His presence aboard was insurance against disaster. The soul within which Christ dwells need not be alarmed.

If the King of peace has taken passage the voyage will be safe.

There is still another kind of glory which calls for ultimate victory over all opposing obstacles. Christ incarnated is the hope of final triumph. It is the hope that the soul which has been born in the image of God shall never perish. There may be lapses like those of David and Peter, but there will not be permanent apostacies. If the germ of the divine life has been implanted in the heart,

* Jno. 14: 27.

lapses will be followed by penitence. David will return to reign and Peter to preach the Pentecostal sermon and found the church.

What is the ground of such a hope? Surely not the stability of fickle human nature, nor the merit of human goodness, nor the fiat of a religious dogma, but the power of the indwelling Christ.

God's way of keeping a tree warm in winter is not to build a fire around it; but to put within the tree a kind of life which sets the ice-king at defiance. God's method of keeping the soul is not an outward covering but an inward life.

This is the sublime hope which sustains the suffering, struggling soul in every hard encounter. Cares multiply, temptations thicken and press sore, the adversary is alert, and strikes at every vulnerable point, but he who is within is greater than all they that are without. If Christ is not merely in the far-away heaven, if he is something more than an example to imitate, if he is living and reigning in the flesh, hindered it may be, but ever here, final victory is assured.

There is a higher kind of glory than any mentioned; and which is germinal in the life that receives Christ. It is the modern conception of true glory. It is service. The reincarnation is not merely an assurance of character, a promise of peace, and a pledge of victory. It is chiefly a plea for service. If Christ is to reach and help the

world to-day, it must be through the people in whom he dwells. If he is to have a residence beneath the skies, it must be in a human life.

This is the incarnation the world is needing now, and to realise it is to suffuse life with the fairest glory earth knows.

"If I can live
To make some pale face brighter, and to give
A second lustre to some tear-dimmed eye,
Or e'en impart
One throb of comfort to an aching heart,
Or cheer some way-worn soul in passing by;

"If I can lend
A strong hand to the fallen, or defend
The right against a single envious strain,
My life, though bare
Perhaps of much that seemeth dear and fair
To us on earth, will not have been in vain.

"The purest joy,
Most near to heaven, far from Earth's alloy,
Is bidding clouds give way to sun and shine,
And 'twill be well
If on that day of days the angels tell
Of me: 'She did her best for one of thine.'" *

If we are to do our best for his, we must have him. The humanitarianism that is merely a sentiment is not to be depended on. It lacks sanity of method and right direction. It falls

* Helen Hunt Jackson.

short of self-sacrifice. The philanthropy which is to make the sad world glad, must have for its life-beat Jesus Christ.

There is yet another glory shadowed forth in the reincarnation. Its full blossom unfolds in the future state, but the bud swells in this. The indwelling Christ is the hope of the life everlasting.

Men are still asking as anxiously and earnestly as ever: "What of the beyond? Is the hope of immortality rational? Is death terminus or transition? Every few days a new book is written, a new society organized. It is the one question we cannot let go. Is this life only one brief chapter in the story, and does the book run on after we have turned the page called "death?" We try to fortify our hope of immortality by argument and investigation.

All men have desired immortality. Is there no food to appease this universal hunger? All men have believed in some kind of a future state. Has not this faith lived too long to be merely a superstition? Science is impleaded. The inequalities of life are urged. Must there not be some place where wrong will be righted and virtue rewarded. Nevertheless, after all our reasoning, the conclusion reached is at best a probability.

Then psychic research adopts the "scientific method," and all death-bed experiences are investigated, while the phenomena of spiritism are seriously pondered. Still a confident hope is not

attained, for as Mr. Fiske says in the book published since his death: "If the value of such evidence were to be conceded, it would seem to point to the conclusion that the grade of intelligence which survives the grave is about on a par with that which in the present life we are accustomed to shut up in asylums for idiots." *

Here the reincarnation speaks its final message to the tenant of time. Christ in the soul is the hope of the life everlasting.

He routed death. He has defied change. No grave has been able to remand him to oblivion. He was never more a living force in human life than now. Willingly he let death put its fetters on him, and then slipped his bonds as easily as the light glides through the ether sea. Death may break down the walls of the flesh house. It may take the light from the eye, and make dumb the tongue. It may lay the body cold and pulseless in a sombre tomb, but if the living and eternal Christ has taken up his residence in the soul, death is but a passing shadow. Directly the sun will break on the everlasting hills, and "there will be no night there."

* John Fiske in Life Everlasting, p. 60.

SUMMIT

"And still the soul a far off glory sees;
Strange music hears.
A something, not of earth, still haunts the breeze,
The sun and spheres.

All things that be, all thought, all love, all joy
Spellbind the man,
As once the growing boy,
And point afar,—

Point to some land of endless, endless truth.
Of light and life,
Where souls renewed in an immortal youth
Shall know the infinite."

XXI

LIFE! LIFE! VICTORIOUS LIFE

"What am I?
Naught! But the effluence of thy light divine,
Pervading worlds, hath reached my bosom too.
Yes, in my spirit doth thy spirit shine,
As shines the sunbeam in a drop of dew.
Naught! But I live, and on Hope's pinions fly
Eager toward thy presence; for in thee
I live and breathe, and dwell, aspiring high,
Even to the throne of thy divinity.
I am, O God, and surely thou must be!"

SIR JOHN BOWRING'S translation of Derzhavin's *"Ode to God."*

"One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth a world without a name."

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

WHAT is the summit?

The answer to that question is the resurrection of Christ.

The resurrection of Christ was not so much an argument as it was a revelation. The Easter message to the world is not so much the annunciation of a mighty miracle as it is the inspiration of a sublime experience. The open mouth of the empty tomb where Christ was sepultured is

not so much a bigot's place from which to shout a dogma, as it is an angel's perch from which to sing a song of hope.

The resurrection is of course, an argument for the divinity of Christ and the immortality of the soul. If Jesus arose from the dead his message is true. If the grave could not hold him, death does not end all. But he who stands by that empty sepulchre scrutinising the processes of cold reason and counting the links in the chain of logic, has missed the best. There is not the place to argue but to discover, and what one beholds is worth more than what he concludes. Easter is the revelation of the power and beauty, the freshness and glory and majesty of life.

It is, of course, the annunciation of a mighty miracle. It was out of the ordinary and above the usual operations of known law. It proclaimed the assertion of a new force. Perhaps, however, if we could rise high enough in our investigations, we should find that the tomb opened that Easter morning as easily and naturally to let the Lord's radiant glory out upon the world, as the green encasement of an Easter lily opens to give the world the beauty and the fragrance of its flower.

One may wonder at the marvel and be astonished that so strange a thing as the rising from the dead should come to pass. He may stand amazed and open mouthed at the mighty miracle; but he has greeted Easter morn to better purpose

who sees in it one of the experiences of victorious life and has his own soul swell with hope, and his own spirit swept with the kindling inspiration of life's limitless possibilities. This is the divinest message of the Easter-tide, " I am come that they mght have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." *

It was just this message which the risen Christ brought his disciples during those privileged days of his reappearance. They laid him in Joseph's rock hewn tomb. His enemies sealed the sepulchre with a stone and set the soldiers to guard the grave. But as well try to cabin the glory of the morning sun in a wraith of mist or fetter Niagara with a rope of sand, as to confine Christ in a tomb. As easily as the sunlight slips over the eastern hills at dawn, the Lord came forth. The grave could not keep him. Life cannot be fettered. That open sepulchre and emptied grave proclaim the glory of victorious life. This was the message of the risen Christ to his troubled disciples.

There in the garden he met Mary. She was shrouded in gloom and crushed with defeat. Christ calls her name and her eyes behold the vision. She does not argue, but as she discovers her Lord unsoiled by death and radiant in the undiminished glory of his power, the gates of life swing wide to the woman's soul.

He walks with the two to Emmaus, and their hearts burn within them. He blesses the bread

* Jno. 10: 10.

at supper, and as his divinity rays out upon their consciousness, all heaven is aflame upon their faces. He calls from the Galilean shore, in the morning's grey light, to the weary toilers in the boat, and a new world greets them there upon the quiet beach. He meets five hundred on a mountain top and shows himself, and henceforth bonds and imprisonment are badges of victory. He rises from Olivet on wings of light to realms of glory before their raptured vision, and the church prepares to sing "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?"

This is the summit of soul struggle and the goal of spiritual development—the achievement of eternal life.

Some say that immortality is conferred and others that it is achieved. Both are right.

The land of promise was God-given to Abraham and his descendants, but they had to fight for every foot they possessed.

Because eternal life is the gift of God, it does not follow that the long and arduous ascent is useless. Life must do more than exist. It must grow if it would show itself.

The summit of soul-struggle is not the terminus of soul-development. It is rather the glorious discovery and rapturous experience and triumphant exercise of life's unhindered powers.

Jesus gave the withered world a vision of the beauty and glory and immortal freshness of life.

He showed men what life can do, how it can triumph, how break through all barriers and rise above all apparent defeats, and claim the universe for its own.

Christ came to transfer the glory of his life to man. He would dower him with its victorious power, and clothe him with its immortal freshness and beauty, and make his worn and weary and defenceless spirit pulse and throb with life; until he shall make his way against all odds and break out of all graveyards and rise triumphant over all that would hold him down.

Christ came to give life. Nothing is more common than decay. It is a dying world. All that we touch reaches its limit and fades. The flower blooms and dies. The green grass waves and shrivels. The bird sings and is silent forever. Forests grow, flourish and fall. The stone crumbles in the quarry, the shore line wears away, the rivers dry in their channels, the mountains stagger, the stars veil their faces. In the midst of it all man runs out his brief span and sinks into silence.

Such is the dirge of the world. Existence is a ceaseless funeral. We are ever burying our joys. We hold our treasures in our arms for one day and then inexorable change takes them from us. At morning a baby's smile, at noontide a toiler's clouded brow, at sunset wrinkles and decrepitude, and with the night the silence of death.

"It withers. It withers.
It withers, it withers—
The world withers, and roses, and women,
My body and all quivering nerves wither!
And time, it goes creeping slowly past me,
And the hours walk by to dig my grave.
I dare not think—I dare not live.
Dare not die!" *

Christ's mission is to make existence immune from decay, to invest being with ability to survive all shock and disaster and rise superior to all change, to confer what the grave can never capture nor death defeat—life. "I am come that they might have life." Christ's plan is to confer life, and leave that to provide all else that may be needed.

He does not begin by saying: "I will make you happy." We might like him to begin that way. We want the thorn taken out of our flesh, the heavy cross lifted from our weary shoulders, the hard way smoothed. But Christ lets the thorn remain to prick us. He bids us take up our cross and follow him. He says, "In the world ye shall have tribulations." He actually declares: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you." Christ does not give happiness ready made. He does something better. He gives us life and lets us make it for ourselves. Life is the secret of happiness. Happiness is the normal state of victorious life.

* Vilhelm Krag.

Christ does not say, "I will change your surroundings." That is what many of us ask for. We are cursed by conquering circumstances, and think if we could get out of this wicked world we might achieve sainthood. But Christ refuses to take us out of the world. He does something better. He enables us to conquer the world. He dowers us with life which clothes itself in such an organism that the world becomes a friendly servant instead of a threatening foe. The fish is not afraid of drowning in the sea. It is its home. The bird is not in terror of the sky. It was made for airy flight. The burrowing worm is not afraid of the dark earth. It is its mother. And so God does not mean man to be afraid of the world.

Neither does Christ say "I will give you statured perfection. Sometimes we call for that. We would spring the goal at a single bound and become as sinless as an angel. But Christ says: "The soul must grow. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Man is not stature but organism. He is the development of life.

Christ does not even give the soul power offhand. He promises that it shall have power, but his way is to bestow life and let life produce power. Life blazes a way for itself. It rends rocks, defies bolts and bars, bursts open tombs, fights and overcomes, mounts and keeps the throne. Hence when Christ says: "Ye shall

have life," he is conferring every needed good. He packs his whole kingdom into a word. Let one possess life and all things are his.

What is the life which Christ confers? Evidently it is something in addition to that the soul already has; else it is not conferred. Christ proposes to give what is not naturally possessed. Because one is human it does not follow that he will fight his way through. Another baptism is needed. It was a sublime moment when God took a clod and touched it with the sacrament of creative power, the man became a living soul. It is a sublimer moment when God takes a human soul and touches it with the sacrament of redemptive grace, and man becomes an eternal life. The difference between a clod and Adam is not more than between man by nature and man redeemed. Perhaps it may be said there is little evidence of so vast a difference. Yonder are two men who think and feel along kindred lines. In looks, stature, weight and gifts, they are very similar. As much may be said of two seeds, one living and the other dead, of the same species. You hold them in your hand and they seem equally good. In size, weight and appearance they are very similar. Yet when they are planted one goes to dust and the other grows the harvest which feeds a nation. So with man. It is the future that will give the test, and the life which is to unfold in power and promise must be born of God.

We must define between existence and life. The stone has existence. It may last, but it does not live. A diamond can never be more than it is, but a rose root, although a homely shrub, has in it a whole flower garden. It possesses life, and life means growth. So with man. The main thing is as to the kind of life germinal within him. Has he tasted the powers of the world to come? Is he existing or living? "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

Christ promises more than mere existence. He has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly. That abundant life is as high above existence as existence is above nonentity. What is the life which Christ bestows? It must be none other than his own. Before life can be conferred it must be possessed. A stone cannot confer life. If the sod is to carpet the earth with green it must itself be living sod. If Christ is to invest a human being with the glory of life, he must be more than a tradition, a beautiful sentiment, a holy ideal. He must be the living Christ.

The only kind of life one can confer is his own. The oak does not grow thorns nor the dogwood elms. Asses are not the posterity of lions nor elephants the offspring of gnats.

Life begets its own kind. Hence the life which Christ begets is none other than his own. This is his explicit promise. He is formed in the believer the hope of glory. He says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

The life which burst the tomb animates the soul. The vital divinity which threw off the fetters of death, and came forth in undimmed sovereignty from the grave's gloom takes up its residence in the soul and becomes the matchless power before which all barriers must yield.

Some idea may be gotten of what this means by a study of Christ's life. What the life did for him it will do for all who have it. One thing it did for Christ was to give him the empire of the material world. He held the keys of nature. Miracles are simply the exercise of life in a higher realm. He has not reached it yet; but if Christ be in him who can doubt that man will reach a stage in the development of this God-given life where he may still the angry sea with a word, master all physical sickness, and command the forces of nature as Christ did. He does not do it now and here, but it does not yet appear what he will be. Doubt says to the slowly crawling worm "You will never fly." But one night the worm draws the curtains of silence about it and sleeps through that shadow of change we call "death." When the morning comes it spreads its wings, for life has pushed into a higher realm and the worm no longer crawls, but flies. It is a picture lesson of the development of the redeemed soul.

Christ also had the mastery over his body. It could not defeat him. He had the world beneath his feet. It could not conquer him. Money,

fame, ease, earthly success, all of which tempt man so powerfully, were powerless to affect Christ. His life was above the reach of such temptations. As Christ's life takes possession, these things lose their abilty to rule the soul.

Death was only an incident with Christ in his march to victory. Death is no more than that to any human soul alive in God. The aged Christian on the verge of dissolution gives no evidence of waning soul-vitality. Natural powers break down, but faith stands strong proclaiming that, after death has done its worst, something abides unsullied and majestic, which passes through the tomb as through a door to glory. Life defies death.

There is an old story of a German princess, who, dying, ordered that her grave be covered with a granite slab, surrounded by solid blocks of stone, clamped together with iron bands, and bearing the inscription: "This burial place, purchased to all eternity must never be opened." A single acorn chanced to be buried in the princess' grave. There it sprouted. A tiny shoot, pliable at first, stole through a crevice. Slowly it gathered strength with the passing years, until at last it burst the iron bands, upheaved the solid blocks of stone, and stood a victorious oak above the rent and ruined tomb.

In every Christian grave there is the seed of life which will break down the walls of the death-house and leave the tomb in ruins. "Who-

soever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." *

All of this is just a glimpse of the possibilities of the redeemed life. It will go on developing, throwing off limitations, pushing out into God's vaster world, rising to higher heights, tasting diviner joys, exercising more celestial powers, and ever pressing up the radiant way along which Christ himself has already passed.

While it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for "we shall see him as he is." Is the soul shut up in a grave? Is it sepulchred? Is it cramped and confined, hindered and defeated? Are there no vistas of promise before the door, no limitless stretches of hope from the window? Would the soul break out of the tomb? Christ can give power.

He is walking still in the eastergarden. Then, when he meets and greets us, the wilderness yields.

Christ is the soul's supremest need. Not some new philosophy of being, not some latest cult or science, not some change of scene or task; but just the breath of the risen Christ upon us, just the touch of him who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life"; just the pulsing love of the resurrected Lord who has come that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly.

* Jno. 11:26.

His is the hand which—
"Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
See the Christ stand!"*

* Robert Browning.

XXII

THE EVERLASTING REALITY OF RELIGION

"Religion is the human mind standing in reverence before the infinite energy of the universe, asking to be lifted into it,—opening itself to inspiration."

CHRISTIAN E. LUTHARDT.

THE value of the victory won by the soul depends on the lasting reality and permanent value of religion.

Is "the everlasting reality of religion" a platitude with nothing but credulity at its back; or is it the statement of a reliable because impregnable fact?

Will there ever come a time when man will no longer feel the need of religion, when worship will be obsolete and prayer a relic? Is religion doomed to decadence? Will the date arrive when man will cease building churches and no longer strive to propitiate a deity whose existence is confined to the imagination?

There are some who believe that such a time has already come. Proceeding on the theory that worship has no substantial basis and is dictated by pious fear or fancy, they argue that there is no reason why man should engage in worship.

Their claim is that as the mind is emancipated from ignorance and cleared of superstition, altars must be deserted and temples forsaken. Is this true? Is the thought of God a dead thought, needing only decent burial? Can the thought of God ever become a dead thought? Is not the religious tendency irrepressible?

In the one hundred and second Psalm there is a striking declaration of the eternal permanence of God and of the everlasting reality of religion. The first part of the Psalm is a dirge over the dreary disappointments of human life and the dismal spectacle of human failure. Ere the song closes, the measure changes to notes of victory and stanzas of confidence, because the singer has caught the vision of One whose glory fades not, and whose years shall have no end.

In the opening verses there is a wail over the withered world. The singer seems perched beside a grave and pitches his lay in the key of trouble. His heart is smitten, his joys are dead, his bones cleave to his skin. He is like a "pelican in the wilderness, and an owl in the desert." Gaunt wretchedness stalks and haggard want watches. His days are shadows. Nothing is permanent, nothing abides. Was there ever a more melancholy lot?

Then from this perch by the grave, the singer looks out upon the stable mountains and the bending sky—the mountains standing like majestic sentinels keeping perpetual vigil over the

waiting, working world, while successive generations come and go; the star-lit sky whose silent changeless face had bent over the earth since that first moment when it was cradled in the thought of God. For awhile these seem to give promise of permanence, but the singer reflects that there was a time when the earth and the heavens began and so there must come a time when they will end. The world will die. The mountains will totter and fall into their graves. The stars will flicker in their sockets and go out forever. With this the wail breaks forth afresh.

Then the singer looks up, higher than the mountains, beyond the vaulted sky and shining stars, and beholds the face of the enduring God. His wail is over, his dirge is silenced. The measure changes from minor to major chords, and with the rapture of immortal life, the song shouts:

"They shall perish, but thou shalt endure;
Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment;
As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed:
But thou art the same,
And thy years shall have no end." *

The Hebrew bard has sung the faith of mankind and the hope of the race.

When it is claimed that religion is an everlasting reality, it is not claimed that religious

* Psalms 102: 26, 27.

views are unchangeable. The views of religion are not religion. Religious views come and go.

There was a time when the Ptolemaic theory of the universe was a religious dogma. Copernicus destroyed it. But he did not destroy religion. There was a time when the dogma that the earth was created in six days of twenty-four hours each was an article of religious belief. Nobody of intelligence believes that now, and yet religion survives. There was a time when the church taught that creation was instantaneous and arbitrary. Many are convinced that evolution, as a theory of creation, has won its fight, and yet prayer continues to be offered and the cross was never more widely preached.

Views of religion are one thing, and the fundamentals of religion are another. Views come and go, but the fundamentals are essential to religious existence. They may be summed up in three statements—

1. Belief in a personal God.
2. Belief in a conscious immortality.
3. The effect of this belief on character and conduct.

These constitute the essence of religion. They are not the affair of an epoch, nor peculiar to any stage of civilisation. They are timeless facts and invest religion with an everlasting reality.

In favor of this position there are three power-

ful witnesses, whose testimony cannot be set aside.

The first is history. As the centuries have come and gone men have changed their religions, but they have not given up religion. They are still changing their religions. They are yielding the good for the better and the better for the best. Only the best can abide. Christianity's claim to be a world religion depends upon its title to be the best. Should another religion arise, better than Christianity, it would become the world-faith. With religions as with everything else, it is the law of the survival of the fittest.

But changing religions is not forsaking religion. Japan has been called "a nation in search of a religion." And why "in search of a religion?" Why not "a nation without a religion?" Because in the very nature of the case it is impossible. History proves that man must have some religion. It would be easier for Japan to exist without a constitution than without a religion.

From the dawn of the race down to the present there have been altars and temples and prayers. In every community of human beings those strange buildings have been erected, which are not for purposes of trade or uses of residence, but which stand as a tangible expression of the people's faith in an unseen God. Why did Cain and Abel erect altars? Why have men ever since offered worship? The custom which is so

universal and permanent must rest on more than superstition. It must ground itself in an enduring reality.

It is impossible to read history aright and omit the influence of religion. Belief in God has swayed men at the momentous crises of human history.

"The religious element is universal, immortal," said Mazzini. "Every great revolution has borne its stamp and revealed it in its origin or in its aim. * * * The instinctive philosophy of the people is faith in God."

Faiths have been the issue in the mighty wars which have changed the map of nations and shaped the destiny of man. Is it reasonable that the force which has reigned over all others, and is reigning still, is to be conquered by that which it has produced? Religion lives in its results, and the voice of history proclaims its everlasting reality.

The second witness is science. The church has had many a nervous chill over the appearance of this witness. It has been afraid that somehow science might deal a fatal blow to the foundations of religious belief.

The arrogance of science, its friends must admit, has not always been a matter of conjecture. There is some reason for the position of the old negro, who had named his horse "Science," and who when asked to explain, replied: "O sah, he's a scientific hoss; he thinks he knows it all."

Science has sometimes shown an overweening vanity. What of that? It has punctured religious delusions and annihilated religious vagaries. In doing this it has rendered the cause of true religion a vast service. God works here and speaks there. We need not fear that God will contradict what he says by what he does. The God who inspires prayer is the same God who teaches the tendrils of the climbing vine to cling to the lattice. The God who cleanses the soul from the stain of sin is the same God who washes the face of the flowers with morning dew, and gives to the lily its snowy sheen.

If science has anything to say to-day about religion it is that religion is a permanent reality. As science has gone deeper into the secrets of nature, it has come more and more plainly to see Him. It finds that nothing has happened. All is in harmony with a mighty plan which binds by universal laws every atom to every world, and relates the universe of being to the individual life. Evolution is not a method to get rid of God; it is a new argument for his existence. Mr. Fiske says: "I believe it can be shown that one of the strongest implications of the doctrine of evolution is the everlasting reality of religion."

The testimony of science corroborates that of history.

The third witness is experience.

Man is essentially religious. His tendency to worship is not acquired but innate. It is less

strange that there should be an eye and no world of light, or an ear and no world of sound, than there should be a soul and no God.

One may deny God's existence, he may be irreverent and skeptical, but he cannot keep from thinking about God. The thought of God is itself a recognition of God's existence. One may be irreligious, but he cannot be religionless.

Man's religious needs are as great as ever. The moral problem has not diminished. The task which confronts religion in the individual life is the same that it has always been. There are sorrows which only religion can comfort, fears which only religion can quell, defeats which only religion can change to victory. A human life needs God to-day no less than did Abel and David, Peter and Paul. The need is permanent. If religion is ever to be dispensed with, it would seem to be time for some evidence of that fact to appear.

It is difficult to conceive of man ever reaching a stage of development, when he can dispense with God. For what is a man's God but his faultless and inspiring ideal? What is religious aspiration but the cry of the soul for life's completeness? Will there ever come a time when there are no higher heights for the soul to climb, no diviner joys for the soul to seek? If not, God abides as the lofty and inspiring goal of the soul's eternal quest.

Here then are three voices, history, science, and

experience, which swell the message of the old Hebrew bard from solo to chorus.

This is not all. There is additional testimony which corroborates that of the witnesses cited.

Upon investigation there is discovered no evidence of the decay of religion. Men have improved in their worship. It is a long distance from human sacrifices to the hearts' adoration. Men have nobler conceptions of God. This is to be expected. If man's view of God is not better than it was three thousand years ago or even four hundred years ago man has lived to little purpose and God has wrought in vain. Because worship has improved, are we to conclude that religion has decayed?

Churches are still building, Bibles are printing and circulating, missionaries are going out in increasing numbers. The Easter offerings in the churches of New York City on the first Easter Sabbath of the 20th Century amounted to $1,000,000. Philanthropy was never more a vocation, charities were never so nobly conceived and richly endowed, human brotherhood was never so strong a pulse in society, righteous causes were never more thoroughly championed and ably defended. All this is but the expression of religious impulse. It proves that the thought of God was never in wider circulation, and religious duty never a stronger spell by which to conjure to good living and right doing.

Nor does it appear that the virtues which re-

ligion produces will ever lose their value. These virtues are honesty, purity, self-control, patience, forgiveness, charity and all those graces whose adjective is Christian, and whose value does not depend on names, dates, or localities. Honesty is worth as much on planet Mars as planet Earth, and charity has as much value in eternity as in time.

Science is constantly revising its dogmas, but religion has never revised its virtues.

In April of 1901 an old illiterate preacher, John Jasper, died in Richmond, Va. He had become notorious because of a sermon preached hundreds of times in which he declared "The sun do move." The newspapers of the land ridiculed him and many a clever journalist made merry at Jasper's expense. But the old negro lived a devoted life. Clean in his character and consecrated in his calling he was a prophet of the invisible, and led thousands of his people into the presence of God and into the practice of the Christian life. In the years to come his ignorance of science will not matter, but the virtues which he practiced and inspired in others will abide. Science must take back some of its dogmas, but religion never takes back any of its virtues. They are permanent values, and because its products are eternal, religion is an everlasting reality.

Indeed is it not evident that all future development for man must be projected on a line of religion? The physical and material evolution of

man, whatever it was, is finished. He is not making a better hand, or ear, or eye. The human body is no more perfect now and no longer lived than six thousand years ago.

It is doubtful if man's brain shows any signs of improvement. If there is to be any further development it must be in the realm of the soul. Says an eminent scholar and scientist: "All future progress (for man) must continue to be not zoological but psychological, organic evolution gives place to civilisation." *

If this be true religion so far from being driven from the field, never so fully occupied it as now. Instead of becoming a deserted calling it is the only vocation with a future. If man is ever to be more than he is, it must be the exploit of religion.

It is the voice out of the unseen which is calling. It is the face which is invisible that entrances. It is the message which the soul, bowed in the oratory of prayer, catches out of the spirit world that casts the magic spell on life. It is the vision of God above the towering mountain summits and the vaulted distant sky which changes man's doleful dirge into a pean of victory.

"There sits he shaping wings to fly;
His heart forebodes a mystery;
He names the name, Eternity.

"That type of Perfect in his mind
In nature can he nowhere find,
He sows himself on every wind.

* Fiske.